
Gakusen Toshi Asterisk Volume3

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These are the novel illustrations that were included in volume 3

学戦都市

三屋咲ゆう

illustration: okiura

03. 鳳凰乱武
ほうおうらんぶ



三屋咲ゆう
illustration: okiura

学戦都市アズラ

03. 鳳凰乱武
ほうおうらんぶ

イレーネ・ウルサイズ
IRENE URZAIZ
Irene Urzaiz

「あたしがデイルから受けた命令は――
天霧純斗、あんたを潰すことだ」

Priscila Urzaiz
プリシラ・ウルサイズ
PRISCILA URZAIZ

「すいません！
うちのお姉ちゃんがとんだご迷惑を……！」

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Chapter 1 - The Opening Eve

“Um..... You are the <Murakumo>[\[1\]](#) Amagiri Ayato-senpai, right?”

During lunch break, as Ayato was taking his lunch at the table of the North Star Cafeteria, a lively female student with chestnut hair accosted him with a big smile.

“.....Eh?”

“Umm....., May I have an autograph?”

Saying so, she readily extended a colored paper and a pen.

“Ah, yes..... I don’t particularly mind.”

Even though slightly pressed by the momentum, he wrote his name on the handed colored paper. Naturally, since he did not have a somewhat stylish signature, he wrote in his standard handwriting. Although confused at first, Ayato had somehow gotten used to it recently.

“Thank you..... very much! Good luck for the Phoenix! I will cheer for you!”

The girl, who received the signature, left while waving her hand greatly.

“Hahaha.....”

Ayato, who saw her off with a wry smile, suddenly noticed cold gazes directed at him and hurriedly turned around.

“.....”

Then, Julis and Saya, who sat opposite to him, were glaring at him with scornful eyes.

“Er.....what?”

“--Nothing. I just thought that the popular ones don't have it easy as usual.”

“Ayato, you're too friendly. It worries me a lot.”

“I-is that so.....?”

While feeling slightly uncomfortable at the pressure of the two girls, who seemed displeased, Ayato scratched his head as troubled.

It has already been one week since Ayato won the duel against Kirin and became the #1 rank of Seidokan Academy. These things were no longer unusual for him. In addition, it was a situation in which whatever such as fans letters, presents, coverage from the Media, various offers from companies, and the like, or anonymous harassment or intimidation, could occur.

Fortunately in the Academy, there seemed to be a department, which brought a follow of those sections, and though they were left in a lump, cases like fetching direct contact as a little while ago would naturally only be dealt by the concerned person himself.

“Princess and also Sasamiya, you shouldn’t be so worked up on the details. Since a nameless non-ranked student has suddenly taken the first place, it’s normal that it became like this.”

Saying so while chuckling was Eishiro, who sat next to Ayato and was slurping the buckwheat noodles in hot broth.

Even looking at the past cases, in Seidokan Academy there were very few cases of a non-ranked student suddenly becoming #1 rank. This was because the nomination system in the official ranking matches made it impossible.

In the official ranking matches held monthly, the system was made so that, when a Page One received a duel request from a lower ranked student, he could not refuse the match; but the students, who participated in this, were divided in three major levels. The first one was that of the higher-ranked students called ‘Top Twelve’, the second was the level of the ‘up-and-coming’^[2] students, who had their name recorded in the Named Charts, and the third was the ‘non-ranked’ students, who did not have their name in the Named Charts.

In the official ranking matches, one could only appoint an opponent, who belonged to one level above. In other words, to appoint a Top Twelve as an opponent, it was necessary to at least belong to the level of up-and-coming students. Therefore, to suddenly become a Top Twelve from having been a non-ranked student, it was necessary to defeat one’s opponent by means of a duel — generally, as the ranking became higher, one would indeed tend to be wary of duels.

In fact, it could be said to be natural if one considers the enormity of what would be lost by their being defeated.

“That’s right. I also, Um..... Luckily, I also became the #1 rank by duel, but still it was when I was ranked #11. Even though it’s me who says it, I think the case of Ayato-senpai, who suddenly became the rank of #1 from being non-ranked, is much more sensational.”

Even Kirin, who was next to Saya and was eating udon^[3], agreed with Eishiro.

Though until just a week ago, Kirin was ranked #1, she did not seem to be particularly depressed.

Furthermore, although in the ranking system of Seidokan Academy, due to a replacement system, Kirin was a non-ranked student at present, she was in a special situation called “moratorium”^[4]. This was a right given to the up-and-coming students including the Top Twelve, and it was a measure in order to minimize the negative effects of the replacement system. Though the up-and-coming students could acquire various privileges, due to the fact that it would cause them trouble if they lost everything at once by a single defeat, they were guaranteed the same service for a certain period of time. In addition, the students in moratorium at the most recent official ranking matches , if it was an opponent below one’s old rank, had preferentially the right to challenge disregarding the level.

“To begin with, when even the Princess became a <Top Twelve>, hasn’t it made pretty much of a racket?”

“It might have been so, but such a thing is just going to, over time, toss things up after all. It ended much earlier in my time, you know?”

To Eishiro’s banter, Julis answered with a serious look.

“Well, it was because the Princess was completely shutout. With that degree of coldness, it would be normal to pull back.”

“Unfortunately, I don’t have the mind for that kind of service. I really appreciate the cheering, but I refuse to be used for crass selfishness. And if so, isn’t it rather more sincere to decline everything?”

As Julis said so, she operated a mobile terminal, and opened a space window.

“Net auction.....? Eh, ah!”

Ayato, who looked into it, raised his voice. This was because his signatures had been put up for sale. Moreover, he wondered whether he should be happy or sad that the price was rising considerably.

Even though it was something not that much time-consuming, witnessing this sort of end was indeed a bit of shock.

“Oh, it’s one of the students’ popular pocket-money earnings. It happens quite often.”

Eishiro, who saw it from behind, tapped Ayato’s shoulder.

“Don’t mind it. You also have fans properly cheering for you, Ayato. Like me.”

“Th-that’s right! In my class there is also a child, who is a fan of yours, Ayato-senpai, even me.....”

To such follows of Saya and Kirin, Julis fearlessly smiled.

“Fufufu, saying such things, actually what do you intend to do if we confront each other in the Phoenix?”

“Oh, speaking of which, I recall the participation of both of you was confirmed, right?”

Although greatly surprised when he heard that Kirin accepted the invitation from Saya to register in the Phoenix preliminaries, it seemed that their participation was settled the other day since there was a vacant place due to some contestants not taking part.

“.....Of course, at that time, we intend to fight you with all our might.”

“Yes, I feel the same. And, this is a different issue.”

Changing the topic completely, both of them turned a sharp, yet straight gaze at Ayato and Julis.

“Fufufu.....Well, it should be like that.”

“If possible, I don’t want to confront you guys, you know?”

Lately, Ayato and Julis were having practice tag team matches with the Saya – Kirin pair on a daily basis, but the winning percentage in actual combat format was about fifty-fifty.

Saya and Kirin were also working together so well that their coordination could hardly be regarded as a rapid increase tag; if they really were to confront them in the tournament, they would indubitably be formidable opponents.

“Fufufu..... I see that everybody is in high spirits. I can’t wait.”

Coming over there was Claudia with her usual mild smile.

“Oh, It’s been a while Claudia. You seem to be very busy lately
.....”

“Yes, it’s hard, since work increases with the approach of the Festa after all.”

While saying so, Claudia unfolded a huge window space on the table.

“.....However, since the tournament table of the Phoenix was announced just some time ago, I thought to let you know.”

With these words, all eyes focused on the window space in an instant.

There were so many names lined up in a row that even counting was troublesome, and a very high tournament table-like castle, which was standing towering above it.

“Wow..... There is an amazing number of participants.”

The number of participants in the Phoenix was 512, that's, 256 sets (teams). Although it was common knowledge, when witnessing it like this, one would be overwhelmed by the sheer number.

“Well, let see, we are Ah, here! We are in block L!”

“Hmm, we are..... in block C, huh. For the time being it doesn't look like we would clash until the final stage (main battle).”

Kirin and Julis mutually looked at each other, and lightly smiled as relieved.

The duration of the Phoenix was about two weeks. Within that period, in the first half, that's one week, commonly called preliminary, the best 32 would be elected. It was that combination table that Ayato and the others were looking at right now. Afterwards, those 32 sets (teams) were to be allocated to a new tournament table by drawing of lots; this was commonly known as the final stage (main battle). It was beyond this best 32 that the points entered to the affiliated Academy.

“But, Claudia, did you expressly come here just for this?”

As Claudia herself just said earlier, she was recently extremely busy. Certainly it was not as if the announcement date and time of the tournament table of the Festa was already determined, but even so Ayato and the others would have known it sooner or later; it was not something for which she would need to expressly come to convey.

“There is that; and it’s also because you guys are top favorites after all. I must have you firmly prepared.”

“F-favorites? How exaggerated.....”

As Ayato lightly waved his hand to deny it, Eishiro with a stunned expression flicked his forehead with a finger.

“Fool, it’s the tag of the rank #1, and the tag of the ex-rank #1 we are talking about, you know? There are no other favorites than you.”

“That’s right. Ayato, Toudou-san, excessive humility is also unpleasant; you must have a bit more confidence in yourselves. You are the representatives of our Academy after all.”

“Y-yes.....”

“Even if you said that.....”

Lowering their eyebrows as troubled, Ayato and Kirin hanged their heads.

“Since especially this time, there are no strong participants, who will appear. Actually, it wouldn't be strange even if either of you guys win the championship, you know?”

Eishiro's words were light, but he was not a man who would say useless compliments.

“As I see it, with members almost expected beforehand, I think that there won't be any big surprises.”

Though natural, No Academy would announce their contestants in the Festa beforehand, either.

But, it seemed that there would still be some info leaking from somewhere, which mostly seemed to turn out to be pretty much the same with the public expectations.

“Fortunately, the absolute figures such as in the previous Gryps and Lindvolus would not be there.”

“Absolute?”

Ayato looked puzzled at Claudia's words.

“She's probably talking about the Silver Wing Knights of Garrardsworth in the Gryps and the Venomous Witch of Le Wolfe in the Lindvolus.”

Julis said while shrugging her shoulders as if bored.

“In fact, each had won a previous Festa with unprecedented and overwhelming power. This time, on the contrary, it will be a large melee. Well, the Top Twelve of each Academy stand out as such.....”

“The winning pair of the last Phoenix graduated. There is the rumor that the World Dragon pair, which was the runner-up, switched to the Gryps.”

As expected, Claudia and Eishiro were well-informed.

As Ayato was listening in admiration, Claudia clapped her hands and looked around at everyone.

“Anyway, in the strategy of this season, this Phoenix is in a very important positioning. And it is not an exaggeration even if I say that the success or failure depends on you guys. I look forward to it.”

Among the six Academies in Asterisk, there were Academies that were skillful in a specific Festa. St. Garrardsworth Academy with team battles in the Gryps, Le Wolfe Black Institute with individual battle in the Lindvolus, and Seidokan Academy with tag battles in the Phoenix, were respectively strong; even looking at the past data they had won those Festa the most.

In other words, for Seidokan, it could be said that earning points is as valuable as possible, this was a prerequisite for occupying a higher rank in the overall rankings.

By the way, the coordination strength of the World Dragon Seventh Institute was high; instead of crying that they were strong in any Festa, it would be better to say that they left stable results in any Festa. The wave of Allekant Academy was violent, there was the characteristic that the Festa in which they were skilled, changed over a certain period of time^[5]. Queen Veil Girl's Academy did not have a particular Festa, in which they were good .

“——Question.”

Then Saya, who was silent until then and drinking orange juice, raised her hand.

“Yes, Sasamiya-san.”

“What happened to the major contenders of the other Academies?”

To Saya who inquired like a student, Claudia, as expected, responded properly like a teacher.

“It's a good question.....is what I would like to say, but Sasamiya-san, you are only interested in those two persons of Allekant, right?”

Saya slightly frowned.

Saya had a minor squabble with a student of Allekant —— Camilla, who came the other day in Seidokan, and she seemed to want to settle it.

“Those two are..... Ah, here it is. They are in block H.”

Julis keenly checked the tournament table.

It meant that they would confront neither the Ayato team nor the Saya team until the final stage (main battle).

“Since there will be more info in the announcement from the Steering Committee, about those people in various ways, there is nothing from me.”

“——Really? Then is it a special case again?”

Eishiro’s eyes brilliantly glittered, to the blurred words of Claudia.

“Ufufu.....”

“Again?”

As she was bothered by the way of speaking of Eishiro and asked, Eishiro cheerfully explained.

“It is always what Festival regulation is being changed, make a special case, or broken. Well, hearing about trial and error is good, but it’s very inconstant. Since normally thinking, it’s impossible for the students of research classes to participate to the Festa——”

“The top priority of the Steering Committee is “to heat up the Festa”. For that purpose, they incorporate more and more new things; if they judged that it will be detrimental, they will quickly throw it away.....That's all there is to it.”

Interrupting Eishiro’s words, Claudia rounded up the talk.

“.....Hmm.”

Although Saya seemed to be clearly dissatisfied, she seemed to find it difficult to get out any info from Claudia’s behavior.

“Th-then, about information of the other major contenders.....”

“Yes, yes, Toudou-san. Please wait a little.”

As Claudia sweetly smiled, she operated the portable terminal.

And, almost at the same time a mail went to the terminal of Ayato and the others.

“So, I sent the data of the event to everybody in the neighborhood just now. Please consider it as help in working out countermeasures.”

“Oh, that helps a lot.”

Immediately they opened the student database, which amounted to many dozens of persons, where each record included a photograph along with the data. Personal data such as: height, weight, if there was combat experience, weapons used, Ogre Lux

users, ability users and other things attached to the record like video recording data of duels depending on the situation. The student database was quite detailed and functional.

“No, no, it’s something that any academy does. I’m sure that by now the data of everyone here is also probably being studied in other schools.”

“Uh-huh. It really say's something about the intelligence capability of the school by how reliable and comprehensive such data is.”

Eishiro, who had not received one person’s data, laughed as fun

“Ah..... Speaking of which, I have heard from uncle that Le Wolfe and Queen Veil were good in that area.”

“Well, it means that we will face them in the light of their own skills.”

Though while saying so, Julis was looking at the data, her gaze suddenly stopped right away.

“——* Sigh *, she will appear after all, huh. How troublesome.”

“What is troublesome?”

Ayato turned back to Julis, who sighed, and looked into her hand.

“This is the user of the Ogre Lux <Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction>. I don’t know what the people of Allekant are plotting, but apart from it, among the guys that are rising here, the most dangerous would probably be this fellow.”

“The name —— Irene Urzaiz. Huh.”

There, a female student with strangely sharp eyes revealing a fearless smile.

If one were to describe the Central Big School Building of Le Wolfe Black Institute, the word “Fortress” would be appropriate. Uncouth yet serious, it was the iron crag, which gathered power and intimidation.

However, though it tended to be misunderstood, there wasn't that much chaotic sense of decadence there. Whether being an Academy some regarded as the polar opposite of Garrardsworth, which was the Academy of discipline and order, or because of the image of slum areas that bad students considered their stronghold; There were many people who held the impression that Le Wolfe was in itself spoiled and in ruin – The reality was somewhat different.

Certainly there were no school regulations of equality in Le Wolfe, and although it was known as the den of individualists

from the outside, this was because there was only one absolute rule that had rooted widely and deep here.

——In other words; “Absolute obedience to the Strong”.

For Le Wolfe, power was everything, and victory was above all revered, but at the same time it played the role of a kind of brake. An overly defiant behavior might be frowned upon by a stronger power.

Another reason was, because of prejudice currently borne by outsiders, it's also said that ‘all the students of Le Wolfe were people similar to atrocious and fearful beasts.’

This also must be referred to as being a great misunderstanding. Such people filled the school population to about 80% to 90% at best. For at least around 10%, even in Le Wolfe, there were students who managed a legitimate student life.

——Kashimaru Corona, who belonged to those 10%, had always wanted to say so loudly. But she had never once done it; all she was doing was just thinking about it.

“What are you doing, Corona? Hurry up and come.”

“Ah, y-yeah! I’m sorry……!”

Reprimanded by the plump male student, who went ahead, she hurriedly caught up with his back on the run.

Dirk Eberwein. As the dominant force in Le Wolfe Black Institute, it was this young man who arrived at the seat of student council president as a non-Starpulse Generation for the first time.

Though there were many cases where the students of Le Wolfe were inevitably regarded as villains in the Festa, this Dirk was the most loathed and hated in all of Le Wolfe.

Never getting his hands dirty, and while moving people like pieces on a board, the man who was sneakily scheming — Dirk's reputation was probably something like that. Frankly speaking, it was the worst. Even though he was not in the rankings, and was willfully given the nickname "Unscrupulous King" by the students, it was understandable.

In fact, Corona herself did not think that Dirk was that much of a bad human being.

Of course, his way of speaking and his attitude were detestable, and let alone his face, which ill-humoredly laughed all the time, she had never seen him broadly smile; But anyway, for Corona, Dirk was an irreplaceable benefactor. If he were the kind of human that everyone said he was, would he have entered Le Wolfe by mistake, and (or) expressly appointed just a goofy girl like her with no merit as secretary?

If it were not for Dirk, a helpless student like Corona might have already fallen in the lowest level campus caste to only be exploited.

(Given what he has done (so far), I can't really say that he's a good person, but I don't think that he's such a bad person, either, as publicly said.....)

Whether or not he was aware of what Corona was thinking, Dirk silently advanced through the gloomy corridor, which somewhat wore a damp feeling. The security level was high around here; it was a section, where entry was not allowed to average students.

(Eh? If I'm not mistaken, what's ahead is——)

Corona's face quickly turned pale.

"Um, President.....? Perhaps where we are going now is....."

"Ah? It's obviously the discipline room."

"I-I was right!?"

Speaking of the discipline room it was, so to speak, a place like a prison in which students, who committed an act that reached the degree of flagrant, were put up for sanctions. As a result, since only the heinous violent student even within Le Wolfe were gathered there, to a petite bourgeois such as Corona, it was an out-of-the-way place, which she wanted if possible to always remain as out-of-the-way as it is.

However, Dirk passed the security checks one after another, and headed towards a secluded place even within the discipline room. Though things that looked like rooms delimited by thick

walls were lined up on both sides of a narrow passage, just by putting up the number plate where were written down a series of digits (number), things that looked like doors were nowhere to be found. Though at the entrance, the security guard offered to accompany him, Dirk seemingly annoyed by it, flatly turned it down, for Corona, there was nothing as discouraging as this.

Angry voices and boos, which leaked from the rooms lining the passage, and sounds like one was rampaging around or beating walls were flying about.

“Uuuuuuuuhh.....”

Corona was timidly advancing while bending her body behind Dirk, who is shorter than herself. While Corona, a Starpulse Generation, who was frightened, Dirk, who was an ordinary person, was instead walking without paying heed to it.

Before long, Dirk stopped in front of one room.

As he held up his hand to the number plate, an optical display appeared; when he operated it, the wall facing the passage disappeared as if being transparent. When looking at the place where the number plate itself which was floating in the air without disappearing, it was not as if the wall itself disappeared, it was only the transparency mechanism which was operated.

“Yo, bitch. Are you alive?”

When Dirk called out so to towards the room, within the room about the size of a three-tatami, there was a sign of something

moving. Though there was no light within the room and it was just faintly visible, it seemed that someone was sitting, leaning against the back wall.

“——Ah, it’s just you, huh. What business do you have as to expressly come all the way to here?”

Though said in a rude tone like Dirk, the voice was high. It was a female student.

When Corona looked closely, she was finally able to discern her appearance.

With an arm tied with handcuffs extending from the wall, she was daringly sitting cross-legged with her uniform figure. Even though it was summertime, a long muffler was rolled around her neck, whether thinking that, she was not wearing an undershirt under her worn-out uniform; it was a very mismatched appearance.

Corona, who was steadily staring at that unique appearance, was keenly glared at (by her) with eyes akin to those of a hung-up wolf, and unintentionally backed off before that intensity.

“Well, I have a request to ask you.”

“Hahaha.”

That girl scornfully laughed at Dirk’s words.

“A request? You wanted to say ‘an order’, right? Since you say it seriously, I don’t have the right of veto.”

“If you listen to me, I will get you out from there even right now.”

“Before that, didn’t you prepare even one supply of provisions? I’m starving to death. If you want, even that young girl will do.”

“Hiiiiih!”

Corona walked around so as to hide behind Dirk’s back.

“Will you do it, won’t you do it? Which is it?”



Dirk continued his point without paying attention to the girl's joke.

"Yeah, yeah..... So, what do you want me to do?"

"It's not a big deal. It's just to crush a boy of Seidokan. So that he would be beyond recovery. I don't mind even if it's in a duel, but the Phoenix is just the right situation. Go for it. —Corona, is the participation Registration done?"

"Eh? Ah, yeah!"

Though surprised to be suddenly talked to, Corona buzzingly nodded.

Speaking of which, as Dirk said, she had performed the substitute application of Phoenix participation registration, but was it for this? However, she did not think that he had not yet talked through it to the person in question.

"Enter the Phoenix?"

"There's the possibility that a duel will be rejected, but that can't happen during the Festa."

Just as Dirk had spoken, up to that point, he suddenly looked into the room.

"If it's you, it'll be a piece of cake to advance to the final stage, right? It'll also be the same for him. Since that way, you'll confront each other somewhere, crush him. You don't need to win."

The last words were with a voice seeming to resound from the bottom of a deep hole.

A cold chill ran to Corona's spine.

".....Oh, of course if you can do it, I don't mind even if you win the championship."

"Don't say it as if it was easy, dude!"

Even while saying so, the girl happily shook her shoulders.

The chains jingled and jangled.

"——There are several things I want to ask."

"Speak."

"First of all, if your target is just one boy, you should just use the <cats>, right? Why do you specially give such a job to me?"

"Because you're the most suitable for the stage called Phoenix. Besides, both <cats> [\[6\]](#) need their hands free. On top of that, if I move those guys, they will take the bait."

"Is it the only reason?"

".....The boy is ranked #1 in Seidokan. If I'm to use the <cats>, it'll be bad for us. Firstly, I want to use legitimate means as much as possible."

The girl, who heard it, cacklingly laughed.

“Ranked #1? Hey, are you serious? Do you want me to confront such a guy?”

“I would not give you this job, if it was impossible.”

The girl silently looked down for a while as she was lost in thought, but she raised her face before long and spoke.

“Secondly. The reason aiming at the boy?”

Whether or not Dirk was also surprised by the question, the clicking tongue sounded through the passage.

It was a habit of Dirk when he was irritated.

“I don’t have the obligation to tell you that, but.....Well, it’s fine. Do you know the <Demon Sword of the Black Furnace>?”

“Haa? What’s that?”

“It’s an Ogre Lux of Seidokan for scholarship. That boy is its user. He doesn’t seem to have already mastered it, but if we let things go by, since it will become a troublesome fellow in the future; we must crush him now, before it’s too late.”

“Hmmm..... Ogre Lux, eh? It must be very powerful, since you mentioned it.”

“——Anyone would think so after witnessing its strength.”

Dirk muttered as if spitting out.

Those words were not addressed to the girl. Dirk talked like that just to persuade himself.

“Well good, then the last question..... It’s more of a confirmation.”

When the girl said so, she looked straight at Dirk’s eyes.

“——I hope that no one will get in my way.”

“Of course. You probably know, right? I always honor contracts .”

Corona calmly took in the eyes, that seemed to shrink only from the aftermath, and Dirk nodded.

Though the two people silently glared at each other for a while, until he eventually diverted his line of sight from the girl.

“.....Well, just because I wreaked havoc in a mere casino, how long do you plan to keep me locked here? If it’s a job, I’ll gladly accept it, Dirk Eberwein.”

“You should have said so quickly, Irene Urzaiz.”

As Dirk complained with a seemingly bored face, he operated an optical keyboard.

The chain came off with a jangled sound, and the girl —— Irene stood up and greatly stretched herself.

“*sigh* Good grief”

While letting her shoulders loose with a cracking sound, Irene muttered.

Her back was quite high and her flexible, well-proportioned body looked like that of a carnivorous animal.

“Well then, for the time being..... I’ll have a meal.”

Two big sharp fangs stuck out from the mouth of Irene, who said so while grinning.

Chapter 2 - The Phoenix Star Warriors Festival

Asterisk Central District General Main Stadium was known as “Sirius Dome”.

Although including the main competition stage, the Festa would be held accommodating the eleven other qualifying stages, held at different halls or domes, as it's venue, the opening ceremony of the 25th Festa was currently being held at Sirius Dome.

Though Ayato once had Julis as his guide and had seen this area before, it was the first time that he set foot in it.

The field within Sirius Dome was still plenty wide enough, even with all the contestants of the Phoenix gathered there. In fact, although it was likely to be divided into smaller areas during the matches, the whole field was presently used for the opening ceremony. Although the contestants of each academy were standing in line there were, apparently, a few students who were absent from some academies. That was particularly remarkable on the Le Wolfe side which, compared to Garrardsworth who were impeccably and neatly lined up, was like the difference between the heaven and Earth.

“Still, there are an amazing number of people.”

“Fufufu, are you referring to the contestants’? Or—”

As she heard the mutter that carelessly slipped from Ayato's mouth, Julis, who was standing nearby, turned her gaze around as she said so with an impish smile.

"Are you saying that while looking at this audience?"

Exactly as the words stated, the audience stands surrounding the field were truly overcrowded.

"Hahaha.....well, I wonder which it is."

Though he heard that the place could accommodate about one hundred thousand people, he was completely overwhelmed when actually seeing it filled up like this. The stands, which were divided into several tiers, were high enough to have to look up at. If looking down from the top tier, at the spot where they stood, they would probably only look like dolls.

While speaking in a low voice, Julis exaggeratedly shrugged her shoulders.

"During matches, a huge space screen in the upper area will be unfolded. It seems that those, who don't see from there, will watch the matches on the screen."

"Then, there's no meaning to expressly come all the way here to watch....."

"I also don't quite understand, but it seems that it's important for them to watch the matches while being here."

While thinking “is it like that?” he returned his gaze.

A platform had been prepared on the field in front of the contestants, who were lined up radially around it; though, until a just a bit ago upon the podium, the mayor of Asterisk had finished with his greetings, and then a middle aged man appeared right after him.

“—Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I am the chairman of the Steering Committee, Madiath Mesa. I am overjoyed to be able to again see your heroic figures here this year and I must say to those, who came over to Asterisk this year, that I am glad to meet you.”

The man greeted so many with a very calm voice, he then revealed a friendly smile.

“That person is the chairman? He is quite young.”

He was probably at least in his mid-thirties. If he was a committee member of the Festa, it meant that he was the chief executive, who was substantially managing the Festa. Though he should naturally be an executive of the Integrated Enterprise Foundation, there was no doubt that he was younger than Kirin’s uncle, Kouichirou.

Nevertheless. With an intrepid look and cheerful voice, one could feel that he was somewhat laid-back. Owner of a well-trained body, which one could tell even when seen from afar, he was obviously of the Starpulse Generation.

".....Madiath Mesa is an OB (alumnus) [7] of Seidoukan, you know?"

Making a face, which said that she knew at least that much, Julis sighed.

"I forget his age, but it's clear that he is young. He hasn't yet reached 40. In his student days, he was a strong man who reigned in the Phoenix."

"I see. No wonder....."

The power of his calm, yet massive prana, even though restrained, could be fully felt.

"Even if he's only the committee chairman, he's a fairly skilled man. He was appointed a few years ago, but as the reformists' top man, he has performed time and time again in the enactment of the new system with its various events and regulation changes. Moreover, all of the changes are highly rated."

"Since he's an OB from our academy, it means that he's an Executive of Galaxy, right?"

"Only in name."

"Only in name?"

Ayato looked puzzled at that point. A bored Julis answered.

“At the time, when Madiath Mesa won the Phoenix, he apparently wanted to enter into the Steering committee right after graduation.”

“Oh, so such a thing is possible.”

Although the entire premise of the Festa was that the Integrated Enterprise Foundation would grant any wish to the winner; It was probably not a very pleasant situation, from the management's viewpoint, that the person concerned was to dig into that part of the system.

“It’s not a world, in which you can somehow manage just by entering it, but I have also heard that he laid groundwork in various ways from his student days. Though I have also met him several times, he’s a very shrewd man.”

“Hmm.....”

Ayato fixedly stared at Madiath.

At that moment, Ayato felt like — Madiath’ gaze caught exactly his.

(Eh.....?)

However, since it was just for an instant, even he wasn't sure.

“—Having said that, even if we talked about it too much for a long time here, since it would probably only dampen your interest, I think I’ll end this by conveying to you another important

regulation change. Well, at the Academy level, they have already been notified, and due to some situation, there have apparently been some leaks spread from that side.”

So, since Madiath continued to speak as if nothing happened, Ayato began to think that it might have been his imagination.

“Although such a restriction was not originally intended on Lux , as the evolution of technology has been remarkable, inconsistent parts came out in various ways. To be more specific, it was about how to treat a machine performing an autonomous maneuver as a weapon.”

As expected, it was Saya, who first reacted to this.

Even though, until just a bit ago, she was dozing off while standing, she was now glaring at the front with a serious expression.

“Although, it is a basic principle of our management to provide you a free reign as long as that could be made possible, for example when considering this; It will become possible for individuals to introduce multiple autonomous mobile units as weapons. Oh. This is not indeed all correct. of course. It is a different issue when talking about the abilities of Strega and Dante though.”

As Madiath was familiar with the topic, he carefully continued his explanation while he slipped in moderating words.

“On the other hand, it is out of the question to impose a restriction on the number of weapons. Though it would be easier to prohibit the use of autonomous mobile units as weapons, like I said earlier, a simple restriction is not what we desire. It would lead to stagnation, and to eventually invite decline. Therefore — I want you to understand that this is, to the bitter end, a measure of reference for future discussions, but.....only this time, it was decided that they could participate as ‘substitute contestants’.”

Immediately, the entire hall was in an uproar.

Not only the students, but also the stands simultaneously became enlivened.

“To you who are wise, I want you to understand that this is not to the advantage of any specific academy, but rather to ensure their equality in the near future. I want you to believe that we always do everything we can in order to prepare the best way for you.”

He then waited until the hustle and bustle settled, and further continued to do so... Madiath now spread his hands greatly while facing the audience.

“And — to you, who love the Festa and give us your support, please expect that this is connected to a new more evolved Festa that has progressed one step up from the last. Because the Festa is always the best amusement in the world, a stage providing matchless excitement and deep emotions, it's the supreme entertainment which quavers one's soul!”

Along with the loud declaration, a stormy applause simultaneously arose from the audience stands. Though, Ayato was thinking, Claudia had said that he had a tendency to welcome new trials with the mood of “it is all right anyway as long as the audience is excited” for the time being, and that seemed to be quite so.

On the other hand, in contrast, the contestants’ reaction was rather cold. Since it was certain that their troubles would increase, no matter how one thinks about it, it was also probably unavoidable.

When Madiath finished the greetings, he stepped down from the platform while smiling and waving his hand.

After that, the boring ceremony continued for a while and when noon drew near the contestants were finally released.

『Well then, this concludes the opening ceremony of the 25th Festa as well as the 24th Phoenix. Players from block A to block I, who are to participate today in the Phoenix, are hoped to be moving toward their corresponding stage by the time specified.

“Um. Since the main stage is our meeting place, we don’t really have to move. Right?”

While hearing the announcement of their respective meeting place's, everyone successively exited from the stage.

Although the first rounds would be held over the next four days , the first match for Julis and Ayato was today, which was the opening day.

“Yeah. That said, there is a lot of time until the match, so we may take a light meal.”

“Mmm. Then let’s do so.”

Since Ayato was also hungry, he had no objection.

“If it’s the case, together with Saya and Kirin-chan.....eh?”

Ayato had started to say, while looking around restlessly.

Saya and Kirin, who should have been there until a just a minuet ago, were nowhere to be found.

Since their first match wouldn't be until tomorrow, there wasn't any need for them to leave.

“Where did they go.....?”

Since neither Saya nor Kirin were tall, it was rather difficult to search for them in this crowd.

“Oh!” Said Ayato.

Among the students heading towards the front gate of the dome , he found familiar faces.

It was not that of Saya and Kirin, but even so it was just nice.

“Hi, Lester. You guys have a match today, right?”

In contrast to Ayato, who called out to him with a smile, Lester McPhail stopped with a really wry face.

“.....So what?”

“We also have a match today, and we were just now talking about going to take a meal. If it’s fine with you, how about going together —— Oh, of course, Landy too?”

Next to Lester, a pudgy student was standing in blank amazement. It was Lester’s tag partner, Landy Hooke.

“Hey Amagiri.....I’ve already said it many times, but I don’t intend to get along with you!”

Thrusting his finger to the front, Lester said as irritated.

“No, I don’t mean that, but.....you know, I haven’t thanked you yet for lending me a Lux last time.”

“As if I need it! Anyway we have to move on from here; if you want a meal, go eat somewhere! Let’s go, Landy!”

“Ah, w-wait for me, Lester!”

Landy chased after Lester who, with long strides, was quickly moving away. Ayato somehow remembered seeing a similar scene before.

But this time, unlike that memory, Lester's feet stopped on the way and he looked back.

"I'll just say one thing. The opponent that I want to fight the most in this Phoenix aren't those guys from other academies, but you guys. Don't lose until we fight!"

And this time for sure Lester squared his shoulders and moved away.

"He's a difficult man as usual....." Said Julis, amazed.

Though Julis said that, Ayato wondered if it was his imagination that there was some sort of sympathy in her words.

".....There you are Ayato." Said Saya as she jumps in suddenly and hugs Ayato from behind.

"Uwaah!"

Being hugged, on the spot like that, Ayato unintentionally raised his voice.

"—Saya, huh.....don't surprise me like that."

".....You are full of openings."

So Saya says, as she slightly and proudly held on to his waist.

Though it was not as if Ayato let his guard down, having said that, it also did not mean he had to brace himself around the clock.

“So, where were you? I was looking for you, you know?”

“I-I’m sorry. I just went a little ways to the locker room to get this.....”

As he turned around Kirin, who was carrying a big load, stood apologetically behind Saya.

“What’s that?”

“Fuffuffu. You’ll be surprised when hearing it. —It’s a bento^[8].”

Saya, who parted from Ayato, slightly puffed up her chest and said.

“.....Did you say bento?”

Julis, with a dubious expression, stared at Saya.

“U-um, actually, last time I have consulted with Sasamiya-senpai — not that, Saya-san.....err, about what I can do to cheer you on, but.....If it is all alright with you, please eat it!”

As Kirin said so, she held out the stacked boxes^[9] which, she had in her hands, with a face dyed red.

“Oh, did you make it expressly?”

As Kirin repeatedly nodded while looking down, Saya though, brimming with confidence, was contrastive.

"I can't really say.....anything, since I haven't that much experience in cooking, Saya-san taught me.....Oh, but, it's really something very simple, though.....!"

"Eh, is Sasamiya so good in cooking that she can teach it to someone else?"

"Ehem!"

When opening the stacked boxes sideways from Saya, who got more and more cocky, there were many rice balls packed there. The shapes were awfully crooked, and even though one could not say that the appearance was by any standard good, it showed very well that there was a lot of hard work put into it.

"I-I am sorry.....I am really clumsy....."

"No, I'm glad. Thank you, Kirin-chan."

Ayato said so and gently patted Kirin's head.

"Uwuh....."

Kirin leaked a thin voice and further curled herself up.

"Unh!"

Saya, who saw it, strongly pulled Ayato's sleeve.

"Ayato, Ayato. Look at mine, too."

"Ah, yes."

When opening the second tier compartment set of the stacked boxes, there were once again rice balls packed there. Their shapes were arranged much better than those of Kirin and they looked really delicious.

Just one point—

“They are.....err, very big.”

Julis, who looked into the stacked boxes, muttered with an expression that said ‘no comment’ (I have nothing to say).

In fact, these rice balls were nearly three times bigger than the normal ones. The way they were earnestly fit into the stack boxes without gaps was quite the masterpiece.

“Better too big than too small. It’s my motto.”

“I don’t mind, but..... don’t tell me that all these stacked boxes contain only rice balls?”

“Is there a problem with it?”

“.....No, I was just a little impressed by you, who insist in calling that ‘teaching cooking’ with this.”

“Ehem.”

“I’ll say this just in case, but it’s not a compliment.” Julis said so while holding her temple.

But Saya did not seem to care about it.

“Now, now, isn’t it just nice that it’s likely to be enough even if we eat this all together?”

“It was originally my intention.”

“So she says, Julis?”

Taking a stab at arousing her interest, Julis nodded while revealing a somewhat puzzled expression.

“.....Well, if it’s like that, shall I keep your shares?”

“Alright, it’s decided. Then, let’s find some relaxing place.....”

Saya once again strongly pulled the sleeve of Ayato, who started to say so.

“Hmmm?”

“—Me, too.”

Saya unusually had a slightly embarrassed expression.

Even though saying it, since only a slight redness on her cheeks was visible, it would probably not be understood by someone, whose acquaintance was short.

“Me, too.....?”

Though Ayato thought for an instant “What are you talking about?”, he understood when he saw Saya sending quick sideways glances towards Kirin.

“Ah, perhaps.....Saya, too?”

“It’s not good to be unfair.”

While smiling wryly, Ayato also patted Saya’s head just like he did with Kirin. Since she was shorter than Kirin, it was somewhat easy to stroke her head.

“.....Yeah, it’s a pleasant feeling.”



While squinting down comfortably, Saya was in great delight.

Her figure somehow seemed to hark back to a cat and was strangely heartwarming.

“*kehen*”

There, Julis coughed with a disappointed expression.

“Well then — that’s right, our waiting room should already be usable. If it’s there, we can eat calmly.”

Saying so, she proceeded rapidly alone.

“Wow, wait a minute, Julis!”

Having said that, certainly it was not like they could indefinitely stay in the aisle like this.

As Ayato urged Saya and Kirin, he noisily ran after Julis, who went ahead, with the stacked boxes.

“Phew……. Thank you for the delicious meal.”

After finishing eating the last rice ball, Ayato joined both his hands together.

"You are welcome. Oh, I will serve the tea now."

Then Kirin, who had already finished eating, poured the tea from the mug bottle, which she apparently brought. The preparation was indeed nice (good).

"Thank you, Kirin-chan."

"U-um. So.....?"

"Yes. It was delicious."

Kirin's face shone at these words.

In fact, although the shape of Kirin's rice balls was awkward, there was no problem with their taste.

As she was very anxious, she now wore a facial expression revealing half joy and half relief.

".....I ate a little too much."

On the other hand Saya, lying down on the sofa, was rubbing her stomach.

"Of course that would be so, if one person were to eat three or four of those huge rice balls."

Julis, who was sitting nearby, said so with an amazed look.

"—Oops, I think it's almost time."

Ayato, who checked the time, turned on the TV provided to the room. Though the waiting room was quite large, and too much for only four people, the space screen was unfolded near the wall surface.

『".....Hi, hi, we are here in the first match site of the 24th Phoenix at the Sirius Dome. The live broadcasting will be transmitted by the ABC announcer I, Yanase Miko, and the commentator, who is an OJ^[10] of World Dragon Seventh Institute, and the commanding officer of the present Executive Aladfar, Pham Thi Tram-san."』

『"Thank you, please treat me well."

『"Alright, it may be too late, but let's review the basic rules! As for the conclusion of a match, when the school badges of both persons of a pair is destroyed, or in the case that the defeat judgment is made by loss of consciousness or forfeit, victory or defeat is declared through the school badge."

『"It's different from the Gryphs, in the point which said that you lose if your leader is defeated."

Two women, one with fluffy curly hair and the other with trimmed short black hair, were reflected in the space screen. The former was the live broadcasting announcer.

"It's almost time for the beginning of the first match. Huh. Since we are in the second match, we can still relax a bit."

“Come to think of it, in addition to this, the other matches also take place in various halls at the same time, right? How do they handle the broadcast?”

To Ayato’s question, Julis replied as if bored.

“There is a broadcast frame for each stage. It’s common to choose the events one likes, but.....it seems that avid fans watch all of them at the same time on multiple channels.”

Speaking only of the first round, there were 33 matches, which would be held on the first day in all eleven qualifying stages. Though the match start times seemed to be put off little by little, even so it was hard to check all of them at the same time.

“.....Even though the summary of all the matches will be broadcasted later anyway.”

“It seems to be a real thrill for those people to watch them live.”

To Saya, lying down as it is with only her gaze turned to the TV, Kirin responded with a wry smile.

“Oh, but being allotted to the main stage is also proof of being a major contender, right?”

“Hmmm, it is so.”

“As usual, it is certain that players, who attract attention, are allotted favorable times and places. If it’s a pair in which a #1 rank is included, it would be only natural——”

As Julis said so, she pointed to the screen with her chin.

The names on the tags, which were now showing for matches in the Sirius Dome, were clearly displayed there.

Among those names, which were allotted entry into the third match, there were a few familiar names.

“.....Oh, so those girls also have a match here today, huh.”

—Ernesta Kühne and Camilla Pareto. It was the pair related to the Allekant incident.

“.....”

Saya, remaining silent, raised her body, and glared at the screen with sharp eyes. In those eyes, a strong determination was perceived. She was probably thinking about quite a lot of things.

While looking sideways at such a Saya, Julis stood up and greatly stretched her body.

“Well, it’s better to concentrate on the match before us rather than thinking about an opponent that we are not even sure to confront.”

Since what she said was indeed true, Ayato also nodded greatly

“If I am not mistaken, the first opponents of Ayato-senpai and Julis-senpai are the knight candidates of Garrardsworth, right?”

“Yeah, they are the #30 rank and #41 rank.”

The Top Twelve were commonly known as the “Silver Knights” , and those with ranks lower than it were placed as candidates. In Garrardsworth, which was the only so called “prestigious school” out of the six academies, they were probably without doubt outstanding students among the up-and-coming students. In fact, their data and combat experience corroborated (endorsed) it.

—However.

“What do you think, Ayato? Can you do it?”

“Well.....I should just try doing what I have to do.”

Julis and Ayato looked at each other and laughed lightly.

Kirin, who saw it, was wonderingly puzzled.

“Have you some sort of special strategy?”

“No.”

However, Julis quickly shook her head.

“It’s rather the opposite. —Well, you should just watch.”

『"—Now then, today's second match, the block C pair first round match will begin!"

The live broadcast announcement resounded in the huge stage.

While a moment later, big cheers as to shake heaven and earth broke out, and multiple lights danced right and left, Julis and Ayato slowly advanced from the entrance gate to the stage.

『"Now, the first to appear are the Seidoukan Academy #1 rank, contestant Amagiri Ayato, and the rank #5, contestant Julis Alexia Van Riessfeld! The contestant Amagiri, to general surprise, just became #1 rank several weeks before this Phoenix! And moreover, since he won in a direct duel against the former #1 rank and became #1, it's just a supernova that we have almost no data about him! Oh, by the way, it seems that he was given the nickname < Murakumo> by the student council president Miss Enfield."

『"He is the only #1 rank contestant participating in this Phoenix. As far as I watch video that currently appeared on the market, it certainly seems that he is considerably strong. We expect a lot from him."

『"Oh, yeah, since it was in the documents, I also saw it, but it said that how much duel it was, it was not quite satisfactory. If only he has at least appeared in the official ranking matches. Oh, yeah! It seems that that contestant Amagiri is the user of <

The Demon Sword of ^{Ser-Versta} The Black Furnace>, one of the Ogre Lux for scholarship in Seidoukan Academy, but.....do you know it, Tram-san?"」

『"Ah, it's one of the so-called "Demon Sword of Four Colors". It's famous among the famous, but even I had only seen it in old image data. The last decade, it was said that it's an Ogre Lux so hard to please that no user was up to it. Though <^{Lei-Glems} The Demon Sword of the White Filter> of Garrardsworth is the most famous among The Demon Sword of Four Colors, I want to see a similar non-defensive weapon^[11]."」

『"I see, I see. In addition to this, his tag partner is the contestant Riessfeld, who is the <^{Gruene Rose} Petalblaze Witch>. It would not be an exaggeration to say that they are one of the favorites!"」

『"The contestant Riessfeld is a young woman with a remarkable (conspicuous) variegation of ability. As a Strega, she is among the top class even in the current generation. And it seems that she still has room for growth; by all means I want her to come to our company after graduation.

『"No, since the contestant Riessfeld is a real princess, wouldn't finding employment at PMC be indeed difficult."

『"Yeah, unfortunately. Anyway, for the time being the attention is shifted over to contestant Amagiri."

『"Well then, we will continue with Garrardsworth's tag....."

Though the live broadcasting and the commentary still continued, Just now Julis poked Ayato's side with her elbow.

"It's said that you're the center of attention, contestant Amagiri."
"

Saying so in a low voice, she chuckled.

"Even though I'm already nervous, why do you say such a thing?"

As Ayato returned with a wry smile, Julis, without breaking her smile, looked into Ayato's face.

"Don't lie. You don't seem very nervous. It's your usual carefree face."

"Even if I'm like this, I'm saying that I'm nervous. Since I don't like to attract the public attention that much."

"It's too late to say that now when you are standing on the most outstanding stage in the world."

Julis shook her shoulders with a chuckle.

"I see that you are not nervous at all, Julis. Even though like me, it's your first participation in the Festa."

"I may look like this, but I'm a princess. I'm used to attracting attention. —Get ready soon."

Julis recovered a serious look and stared in front of her (ahead).

When looking, from the entrance gate on the other side, a pair of young men had already activated their Lux. Though with a tall youth and a youth with a somewhat small stature, they looked like an uneven (incongruous) pair, each of them was holding a sword-type Lux. In Garrardsworth, conventional sword techniques were considered the path of righteousness, and it also seemed that there were a lot of students there, who chose a sword as their weapon.

Ayato also took out Ser-Versta from the holder on his waist, but he did not activate it yet.

『"Oh. The match start time is gradually drawing near! I wonder regarding this match, who will be the one seizing victory, Seidoukan or Garrardsworth? Well then, today's second match finally starts!"

As if responding to the voice of the live broadcast, the school badges worn on the chest emitted a light. Since the Festa time processing was fully automated, neither declaration nor agreement was required like in a usual duel.

"Phoenix Block C first round set, match start!"

At the same time the mechanical sound of the school badge told the game start, the two of Garrardsworth set up their sword and charged straightforward. According to the data, both of them, who were skilled in close range combat, was an offensive pair, which did not establish a rear guard. Perhaps by bringing to close combat, they probably intended to finish the game in an instant. If Ayato

was to intercept one of them, the other one would go toward Julis to seal her act as a rear guard (of Ayato). It was a simple, yet effective strategy.

“.....Well, it is within our expectation.”

However, Julis, with her arms folded, nodded with full of room to spare.

She did not even take out her Lux.

“Well then Ayato, I leave it to you.”

“Roger.”

While answering, Ayato concentrated his prana in one go.

“—Secret sword bound by the prison of stars, release your might!”

The prana, which increased, broke the seal applied on Ayato, and an explosive prana was released. Ser-Versta, which activated at the same time, let its huge blade shine.

“Wha—!?”

Surprised at the quantity of prana, the two of Garrardsworth slightly eased up their speed.

But. In an instant, quick as the wind.

“Eh.....?”

“Ah.....!”

The two contestants gasped weakly in surprise. For them, it might have felt like Ayato suddenly disappeared.

And, after what only seemed like a second, both their school badges broke with a dry sound and fell.

—Running completely through and between the two people, Ayato released a god-like speed slashing.

“End of the match! Winner, Amagiri Ayato & Julis Alexia Van Riessfeld!”

In the hall, which fell silent as if having been hit by water, a mechanical sound echoed.

Just like the silence of a blank space (vacuum).

—However, taking time into consideration even if a little, big cheers soon wrapped up the hall as if bursting out.

『".....This, this is amazing! There was not even time to do a live commentary! What speed! What strength! This is no longer of the level of being called overwhelming!"

『"Oh dear! Nicely done!"

『"What surprised me even more than that strength, and more than anything was contestant Amagiri's very flashy performance! A ridiculous amount of prana instantly rises up just like a pillar, and the hall was also in great excitement regarding this!"

『"If it's only the amount of prana, I think he doesn't lose to our president^[12], either. I wonder if he could come to our company after graduating. He would become an immediate asset^[13]."』

While excitement and enthusiasm swirled, Garrardsworth's tag was standing just like that in blank amazement.

As he returned to Julis' side while slightly feeling sorry for them, she went out to meet Ayato, who lightly raised his hand.

"Fufufu. As expected."

He did a high five^[14] to Julis, who returned a satisfied smile, the two left the stage as it is. The match time did not probably even reach ten seconds. It was indeed an instant killing.

"After this, it's the winner interview. Whatever you are asked, evade it properly. Refrain to give information as much as possible."
"

Along the way, Julis was giving a warning.

"Roger.....But I'm a little anxious. To believe that we can't even activate our weapons."

“What, I have laid the installation type ability, so there’s no problem. Even if the other party is to break in, he will go bang.”

Julis, who expressed the explosion by opening her fist, fearlessly smiled.

“Anyway, with this, we were able to preserve through the first round without showing our link pattern. I want to go on like this.”

What Ayato and Julis wanted to cover above all was that there was a limit to Ayato’s best state (full strength). Though among those, who directly watched Ayato’s duel, there might be some who had vaguely noticed, he wanted to avoid to make it deterministic (definite) as much as possible. From that perspective, he also wanted to conceal the flow of the seal release as much as possible, but if he were to release it before appearing in the stage, it would not last that much time. In that case, in the two’s conclusion, openly doing it would be better as to let the audience think that that was a part of the performance, according to their plan. Of course, they did not think that such means would work forever, but it would be better if it was exposed as late as possible.

And then, what the two wanted to conceal after the limit was their coordinated attack pattern. It was only about two months ago that Ayato and Julis made a tag team. Although they wanted to polish their coordination as much as possible, it was undeniable that it paled in comparison to that of a pair, which was formed for years.

Leaving aside the opponent’s level this time, against an opponent with a level, which can accommodated Ayato, who

released the seal, a coordinated attack would after all become the key to victory. They wanted to keep it hidden as much as possible.

“At least we won’t confront strong candidates during the qualifiers. Until the final stage (main battle), we must put on airs as much as possible.”

While advancing in the passage toward the interview space, Julis said so with a serious expression opposite to her way of talking normally.

“.....Phew, we are back—”

“Good grief.....”

Ayato and Julis, who returned to the waiting room, sat down on the sofa, completely exhausted.

“W-Welcome back! Congratulations to both of you!”

“.....Why are you so tired? Even though it was an instant win.”

Since Kirin and Saya, who welcomed them, were wondering while looking at both of them, Ayato answered with a bitter smile.

“No, the match was not that much. However, the audience after it was.....”

"The mass media guys outside were really persistent. In this way, our journalism club is far better."

With a tedious face, Julis gulped down the drink, which Kirin held out, in one go.

In fact, when it came to surviving after the match; 'The winners interview', there was nothing more tiring than it. About Ayato's performance and Ser-Versta of course, the details of his relationship and participation with Julis, and on top of that his favorite food, and private questions which had nothing to do with the match, they were forced to keep company on and on for nearly one hour. It was also probably that, which disposed of all their energy.

"Ooh, those are nice words."

A voice suddenly came from the wall side.

"Oh, Eishiro. You came, huh."

"First of all, congratulations for the victory in the first match."

As Eishiro said so smilingly, he took a photo of both of them with the terminal in his hands.

"—I will say this just in case, but by simply saying that it's relatively better, it doesn't mean that I particularly became friendly to you guys."

"Yeah, yeah, the princess is strict as usual."

To Julis' sullen face, Eishiro shrugged his shoulders exaggeratedly.

Though anyone could come and go to the waiting room, but unless the lock codes were changed from the inside, the door would not open. Of course, if the visitor was given permission by an authorized human... And. Since, at this time, authorized permission was only given to Saya and Kirin, they had probably invited him.

“So, what’s wrong? You didn’t come just to cheer for us, right?”

It was already August. Most students, who did not participate in the Phoenix, were off on summer vacation.

Even Asterisk, which did not easily hand out passes, was expected in making an exception for the long summer vacation when there were so many students going home. But, since there were a few hardy students like Eishiro staying at the academy, from a general perspective it seemed to be about fifty-fifty^[15].

“Hahaha. I wouldn’t need to cheer you with people of that level as your opponents. My aim today is —— the third match.”

“.....I see. Allekant. Huh.”

Julis nodded in the way agreeing.

“Oh yeah, the announcement made at the opening ceremony had made my journalist soul boil. Whoever has heard anything they would understand that it's about those two from Allekant.

That being the case, I immediately went to the waiting room of those two for an interview, but.....”

“Did you find something, Yabuki?”

Saya briskly walked to the front of Eishiro, and intently looked up straight at him.

“It’s a complete shutout. There is a heavy security so as to not let even one cat pass; I was flatly sent away.”

“.....What!”

Saya, disappointed, dropped her shoulders.

“Well, there is no need to rush. Even if we leave them alone, the third match will start very soon.”

“Eh? Speaking of time, isn’t the match of Lester and Landy soon, too?”

“Ah, yes. If I’m not mistaken, since McPhail-senpai and Landy-senpai should have their match in Capella Dome.....”

As Kirin turned on the TV and matched the channel, the big frame of Lester, who set Bardiche Leo, was projected just in the space screen.

“Hmm, it seems to have already begun.”

“Thank goodness.....seemingly they are dominant.”

As to support Lester from the rear, the several arrows shot by Landy were continuously attacking the opponent. As they were longtime friends, their very good coordination was balanced.

"If the match days were different, I would have gone to cheer them."

"Stop it. You would only be sent away."

To Ayato's mutter, Julis laughed as if making fun of him.

".....But those two are doing quite well."

Saya seemed to be impressed by Landy's shooting skills.

"Oh well, McPhail is a Top Twelve, and his partner Landy Hooke, in a sense, also has the experience of an up-and-coming student. And he uses it accordingly."

"The opponent is a pair of Allekant."

Lester efficiently used his inborn power control, and overwhelmed his two opponents at the same time. Once in this partner, Lester was strong. Even the rear support of Landy also exquisite, had skillfully restrained the opponents, who tried to escape from Lester's reach.

As everyone was somehow or other watching Lester and Landy's match, a thunderous sound like the earth tremor suddenly reverberated through the wall.

"Wow!?"

Though Ayato and the others instinctively looked at each other, they immediately discovered the origin of that sound.

It was cheers.

“Wait, damn it! It has already begun, huh!?”

Eishiro hurriedly unfolded another space screen.

Indeed, if the hall was this much lively, there was but one reason for it.

Cheers, as to shake the earth, did not seem to settle down, and it seemed that excitement and enthusiasm, and above all surprise were spreading more than when Ayato and Julis adorned their spectacular debut earlier.

“—Tch!”

What was projected by the space screen, which started up, was as expected —— the figure of two machine dolls.

Chapter 3 - Ardi and Rimsi

The two puppets standing on the stage of Sirius Dome — one of them had a figure similar to a battle puppet. However, you could say that it was two times bigger than the ones normally operated. With a stature easily exceeding two meters, its form, which was clad in armor, looked like a machine-made knight.

And the other puppet in contrast, was mostly similar to a human — and moreover, had an outward appearance, which was not discernible to that of a human woman. Its features were too perfectly arranged, and its delicate figure was wrapped in an armored-like metallic suit.

Both of them were adorned with the school badge “Dusk Owl” of Allekant Academy on the chest.

『"Well, well, finally the new model puppets of Allekant took off its veil! This time..... though they are the substitutes of the contestants, err, Ernesta Kuhne and Camilla Pareto — actually, how do you see it, Tram-san?"

『"Let's see. Because of my line of work, I also happened to be engaged in countless arguments with battle puppets, but if based on that, however much its efficiency is improved, honestly I don't think they could stand against a Starpulse Generation. Even though the battle puppets up to now were, for the most, operated by humans from the exterior, they would never match us regarding the reaction speed. Since no matter what, a time lag would be generated in response."

『"I see, I see. But then, what about the puppets this time, which are an autonomous type?"

『"Hmm, certainly, they have self-consciousness.....or perhaps should I say an AI^[16] of a level where self-judgment is possible and put in practical use for the time being, but still I have never seen that they possess the ability to make judgment at the level of Starpulse Generation in combat."』

『"Hahaha, I see. But, the regulations were expressly revised so as to insert these two puppets! So we can expect that it would surely not be only on that level, right.....and oh, excuse me for a moment.....yes, yes, I see.....Err, ahem! Excuse me! Just now, information regarding the two puppets was delivered to the live seat. And moreover it is from the developer, the contestant Ernesta Kuhne!"

『"E~eh, well it's a nice service."

『"By all means, it said "today, I am hereby lifting the ban on information". Oh, and then, according to this information, the name of the big one is autonomous type puppet prototype AR-D alias Ardi, and the female type is autonomous type puppet prototype RM-C alias Rimsi."

『"Just in case, does 'substitute participation' mean that it is better to put up a contestant?"

『"Hahaha, I wonder how it is. Well, that aside, there are also a lot of information, which seem interesting, for example....."

While listening to the commentator and reporter, the rank of
 Septentrio
 #12, the <Spiral Magician> of Le Wolfe Black Institute, Moritz,
 who was facing Ardi and Rimsi, annoyingly clucked.

“Hmph, I don’t like that.....! That the likes of machine puppets
 attracted attention in vain.....”

Though the appearance of Moritz with ruffled black hair was
 like a dead tree, his expression was strangely sharp. His tone was
 polite, and he was firmly wearing his uniform, which was
 something unusual for a student of Le Wolfe.

Though of the lowest seat in the Top Twelve of Le Wolfe, he
 should have originally gathered the public attention as one of the
 major contenders, but the leading actor on this stage was evident
 for everyone.

“To treat me like a stalking horse, I see that even the
 administration does sometimes screw around.....!”

“.....So, aniki^[17], what do we do?”

Moritz’s tag partner Gerd, who spat out so from behind him,
 accosted him in a low voice while activating his Lux. His sturdy
 build was dignified by shouldering an assault rifle, which he held
 in his hands with competence.

Though Moritz was a leader of a group of dozens of people in
 Le Wolfe, Gerd was one of the the most skilled even among the
 underlings. Thanks to his excellent shooting skills, they managed

to reach the main battle (final stage) with this tag team even in the last Phoenix. Above all, his obedient and taciturn side was also pleasant.

“There is no need to ask. We do as usual. For the time being, you have to devote yourself as the backup.”

After all, since there was no data at all of the opponents, he could not set up a strategy. Though each academy also sometimes prepared a hidden card for the Festa, and it was also not unusual that there were opponents with no data on them, nevertheless this time was a too much rare case.

—That and.

“You humans there! Listen well!”

In a sound volume as to shake the air like an electric shock, Ardi, which folded his arms, spoke towards Moritz and Gerd.

“I stand in this battlefield under the command of my great master! And at the same time, my long-cherished desire is not to attain victory itself, but to make known my dignified appearance that was granted by master! Therefore, I want you to become a cornerstone that exhibits that evidence!”

Moritz was somewhat broad-minded but couldn't quite believe that a machine could talk intelligibly, and yet with an extremely arrogant tone too.

Ignoring Moritz, who was taken aback, Ardi further continued to speak.

“I will give you one minute of time. In the meantime, I will not move even one finger. You should freely set an attack.”

To these words, veins ran to Moritz’s temple, and he fell into a blank stare.

“Y-You bastards——!”

But, the moment that the enraged Moritz took a step forward, a light bullet exploded in the temporal region of Ardi’s head. A dull sound reverberated and Ardi’s head slightly swayed.

“.....It hurts, Rimsi.” As Ardi complained in a sullen voice.

“Shut up.”

Rimsi, standing nearby, coldly replied without even looking at him. Before one knew it, a large handgun type Lux was grasped in her hand.

“Yeesh, you brainless dull idiotic ignorant hunk of metal. With what kind of authority do you voice such bullshit? If you have so much energy to spit out such worthless grumbling, you should use it for master’s sake. We should just faithfully and reliably carry out master’s command. Even now, you can return to the lab and receive maintenance. About your head, got it? Oh, but then, since you will cause trouble to master, you should rather break and perish here. If you want, I may lend you a hand for that.”

Like Ardi..... No, that one was using a more fluent tone. However, this one, Rimsi, seemed to be more machine-like with no emotions.

By the way, in a Festa, launching an attack before the match the announced start was a foul act of immediate disqualification, but in case of one's teammate becoming one's opponent, it would not be restricted.

"Even you say so, Rimsi. If fellows of this level are our opponents, our superiority — will not be eventually enough to make them understand however much a noble grand existence master is. If so, I judge that something like an effective performance was necessary, but....."

"Certainly, it is a splendid idea to make known master's greatness. Let's evaluate that point."

"That's right, that's right!"

Ardi repeatedly nodded contentedly.

"Hmm.....? No, then why did you shoot me?"

"Because I was somehow pissed."

Rimsi flatly asserted with her deadpan as it is.

".....Unh, then it cannot be helped."

Ardi kept quiet while rubbing the shot mark.

As Rimsi sighed by seeing it, she turned towards Moritz and Gerd.

“Well, humans. Even though it was bullshit from a defective trash machine, if I were to revoke what he had already said, it would bring disgrace to master. Therefore, though I am reluctant, I also promise that for one minute I will not attack.”

To these words, as he had already passed his anger, a light amazed and mocking smile floated on Moritz’s face.

“.....Ha-hahaha! Is that so, then I will take upon your offer without reservation.”

If carefully thinking about it, there was no need to get angry if the opponent was expressly willing to present a disadvantageous condition. Though he did not like how they were underestimated, such a thing was trivial when compared to a win in the Festa.

“Gerd, you take care of the thinner one. I will take care of the big one.”

“.....Roger.”

Gerd who was in the rear slightly nodded.

『“Well now, it kind of became something amazing; but it’s almost the start time! A showcase match; which tag team will emerge victorious?”

Almost at the same time with the live broadcast, which heralded so, the school badges declared the match start.

“Phoenix block H first round pair, match start!”

As soon as the match started, Moritz rushed straight from the front towards Ardi.

Gusts of wind, which suddenly arose, clung to both his arms, and formed drill-shaped triangular pyramids.

This was Moritz’s ability as Dante — the <Spiralling Gale>^{Boreas Spira}, which scooped out all things. Though it was an ability which did not effectively work in practical use, if looking at the only aspect of simple destructive power, there was no doubt that it was top class ability even in Le Wolfe.

Rather, the overly high offensive ability and his strange aggressiveness were, for the most part, to be penalized as atrocities (cruelty).

However, fortunately, the opponents this time were not humans . So he could exercise his ability to his heart’s content.

(If I have one minute, then it’s enough. I will make (do) you scrap in no time.....!)

The drill-shaped wind raised a roar, and increased its rotation.

As declared, Ardi did not show sign of moving and remained with his arms folded.

“Hahaha, what good courage! As you desire, I will make a wind hole in those guts!”

Moritz’s right arm let out to pierce the abdomen of Ardi, who had a daunting pose.

—However.

“Wha-!?”

The blow was prevented by a wall of translucent light that appeared without any warning in front of Ardi. It was a thin rectangle of about one meter wide and two meters height. It looked like a space screen at first glance, but unlike it, it seemed to somehow possess a physical interference power.

“Damn it! But don’t think that such a thing would continue defending against my power!”

The ^{Boreas Spira}<Spiralling Gale> in Moritz’s arm raised a roar, and further increased its rotation.

Sparks scattered as if dancing, and a shrill fricative sound-like a cry reverberated.

—Even so, the wall did not budge.

“—It is useless.”

Ardi arrogantly declared.

In that declaration, honesty to tell an undeniable fact and clear self-confidence were coexisting.

“Tch! Then.....!”

As Moritz instantly sneaked around behind Ardi, he drove the ^{Boreas Spira}<Spiralling Gale> aiming at the back this time.

(I don’t know of what kind of structure it was made, but if I attack from a blind spot, then...!)

In order to take full advantage of his ability itself, which specialized in close combat, Moritz also had a high level of taijutsu [\[18\]](#). From the opponent’s perspective, his flowing movements should only be seen as if they disappeared. Though he launched blow with absolute confidence — the result betrayed him.

“!?”

The wall of light, which suddenly appeared as a while ago, deflected Moritz’s attack.

As expected, Ardi did not move an inch. Of course, he was not even looking towards Moritz.

“—Another 45 seconds.”

At that moment, Moritz felt an indescribable shiver, and promptly took a distance.

Cold sweat streamed down his back.

He wondered, right now perhaps, if he wasn't having terrifying second thoughts as opponents might.

As such a thought crossed his mind, Moritz shook his head as to drive it away.

“Gerd, Strategy change! Here.....” As he halted in mid speech right there.

Moritz looked back and opened his eyes wide.

Gerd, who was facing the other puppet — Rimsi, seemed to having a fierce gun battle. They mutually set up large gun type Lux, and countless light bullets were flying about between them.

But, looking closely, it was always from Gerd that attacks were launched; Rimsi was only returning his bullets as a way to fight back.

—No, wrong.

Rimsi was not fighting back. She was just defending against being shot at by directionally rebounding the bullets.

Normally, when light bullets of Lux collided into each other, as long as there was no great amount of energy difference, they

would just disappear. However, of course aiming expressly at each and every one was virtually impossible. Moreover, being able to shoot all the bullets scattered from a semi-auto, was already in the domain of superhuman feat.

Rimsi was managing it with a cool face, without moving one step.

“Such a thing.....is impossible!”

Also in the voice of the usually calm Gerd, impatience was spreading.



While changing the distance and moving around, he waited for an opening and shot a rain of light bullets — but still, nothing got through.

“—Another 30 seconds.”

Moritz, who was looking at that spectacle agape, came to his senses after being startled by Ardi’s voice.

Both Ardi and Rimsi were devoting themselves to the defense, exactly like they declared.

If they were to turn and mount an attack.....?

“Uoooooooooooooh!”

Moritz concentrated his prana, and raised a cry as to brush aside the fear born in him.

(Then, I just have to crush him within the time!)

A stormy wind raged around Moritz; it converged and a tornado like dragon rose up. The pointed end became a <^{Boreas Spira} Spiralling Gale> with the shape of the drill, and started to pull out only the core of the giant drill.

The audience rustled to the bold move, which shook the air.

“<^{Boreas Mordent} Rending Gale>!”

Moritz's trump card was a special skill. Though there were not many opportunities to use it from the fact that control was difficult, the consumption of prana was intense, and above all, the attack speed was painfully slow to hit the opponent, if only considering the destructive power, he had pride that it was the greatest in Le Wolfe.

"Eat this!"

Moritz shook his arms, and in accordance with it the tornado moved so as to wriggle the dragon; it rushed on at a stretch aiming at Ardi.

As a while ago, the wall of light, which suddenly manifested, intercepted it. Intense sparks, as if a small explosion occurred, danced down, and a shrill sound as the rubbing of metal pierced the ears.

Nevertheless still, Ardi did not move.

"Ooooooooooh!"

Moritz poured prana as much as he could have to the <
Boreas Mordent
Rending Gale>.

However — the wall of light did not shake.

Though for a while the tornado was violently twisting like a dragon rampaging..... the wind began to weaken little by little before long, and its rotation gradually became loose.

“Haa.....Haa.....”

As he used up his prana, Moritz, heavily breathing, weakly sat down.

Though Ardi, with a daunting pose, was looking down at such Moritz, he suddenly unfolded his arms and said.

“—One minute.”

As he activated the Lux with his hand at the same time, a huge hammer as much as Ardi’s height appeared. Its head was as thickly big as that when Moritz widened both his hands.

“It is time!”

As Ardi came walking to Moritz with slow and heavy steps, he lightly raised the hammer.

Moritz looked up at it while sinking down to the floor; he could no longer do anything but to reveal cramp laughter.

When he turned his gaze aside for an instant, Gerd was already lying down on the ground.

“.....You monsters!”

The hammer was swung down at the same time that Moritz muttered so—

“End of the match! Winner, Ernesta Kuhne & Camilla Pareto!”

In the hall that fell silent as if striking water, the mechanical sound, which told the conclusion of the match, echoed.

All the spectators present in the audience were agape.

Hurried footsteps resounded after a short time; it was the medical staff dispatched from the Medical Center, which came to carry out Moritz and Gerd with pale faces.

Afterwards finally, thunderous applauses and cheers poured down over the stage.

『"This-This is a big surprise! The time it took to settle the match is just one minute! No, if it's that much, it isn't something rare. In fact , today's second match was settled more quickly. However, we could say that the one minute, in which we had witnessed a glimpse of ability of contestant Ardi and contestant Rimsi, was really dense, yet rich! Don't tell me those two — oh, for convenience, "those two" referred to contestant Ardi and contestant Rimsi; anyway, to think that those two have that much combat ability....."

"—Good grief, they had been completely eaten."

When Julis said so and turned off the TV, she took a deep breath and sank herself in the sofa.

Ayato included, also both Kirin and Saya had long faces, which showed that they haven't yet come to believe what they saw.

"Well, I guess today's top news will be this, definitely. Otherwise, it would be princess and Ayato."

Even Eishiro, who said so, had an expression that could not hide his surprise.

"But, to think that that < Spiral^{Septentrio} Magician > was completely helpless.....it was indeed surprising."

"Y-You are right.....if we are to confront those two, I think that they will be formidable enemies."

To Kirin, who muttered in a thin voice, Julis slowly shook her head.

"No, if it is only about winning, we, as well as you, can properly deal with people of Moritz's level. That's not the problem."
"

".....It's as Riessfeld said."

Then Saya nodded as to agree with it.

"That wall of light. That is troublesome."

"I don't know what kind of trick is used for it, but judging from the fact that it completely defended against Moritz's ability, average offensive abilities wouldn't be able to break through."

As it became troublesome, Julis rested her chin on her hand.

“Perhaps that wall of light is an application of a defense barrieris what I think.”

“When you say defense barrier, do you refer to something similar to what is put around this stage? But that should be a really large-scale device.....”

Surrounding the stage, a defensive barrier-wall is erected in order to protect the audience from stray bullets or emergency accidents and the like; but a large quantity of energy and a large-scale system were necessary for that.

“Perhaps all that was miniaturized so as to allow it to deploy independently.....”

“Indeed. Well, since I’m going to the winner's interview and listen to what they say, I will ask.”

Eishiro said and stood up from the sofa.

“You say you will ask, but.....how?”

“It’s almost time for the winner’s interview, right? I will try to see if I can’t creep in.”

“Eh? B-But, they don’t allow the student press in there.....”

While the outer press media were not allowed within the campus, in official events under the direct control of Asterisk such as the Festa, it was a principle to give priority to the off-campus

press. There, people with student's status were probably not even allowed in the press conference room.

"Hehehe, doing something about it is what being a first-class journalist is. Well, just see."

He said To Kirin, who seemed to be anxious. Eishiro broadly laughed and left the waiting room with light steps

".....Well, if that guy learns any information that might be useful later, I will be thankful in that case. We should just wait without expecting much."

Exactly as stated, Julis had a face which showed that she was not expecting anything at all.

"—But, I want the data."

Saya muttered so with a serious expression.

"Yeah. It is first certain that we as well as those puppets would reach the final stage (main battle). We must collect as much information as we can until then."

While the other side had their data, it was indeed disadvantageous for them since they could collect data based only on today's match.

"If possible, I would like to watch the match directly."

Since the flow of prana and the movement of the mana could not be understood from a video, if it was possible, directly

confirming it with her own eyes would be the best way. Though the ticket of the Festa, however lowest the seat was, was a special platinum ticket, the competitors could use the booth to watch the matches of any academy.

“That’s, if possible. The first round aside, the match interval will become shorter and shorter from now on. If there are matches on the same day like today, it will be difficult, too.”

“Oh, I see.”

If the match locations were different, it would be hard just to move between them, and even within the same hall or dome, depending on the order of the matches, they would not be able to watch a match leisurely.

“.....Hmm, Excuse me a bit.”

Suddenly, Saya took out a portable terminal.

She immediately opened a space window, but nothing was reflected in there. In case where the calling party had turned the video transmission off and that the receiver had turned it on, it would become like this. In other words, it was a form where her image reached the other side, but only the sound from the other side reached her side.

『"Oh, Saya, huh! Hey, did you see it? The match now!"

“.....I saw it.”

『"Fufufu, The producer of that — you did say she is called Ernesta Kuhne, right? She is very good even though young! From just what I saw, more than five mana dices should have been used in those puppets. But instead to letting them directly connect, the control area is moist in the concomitance control (management) system around one core. Yeah, interesting indeed! They might hardly being controlled by humans, but if it is an AI, it will be theoretically possible!"

".....I understand. But, calm down a little."

『"Hmm? Oh, sorry sorry!"

The voice of the man, who kept talking and suddenly got excited, was familiar to Ayato.

"Um.....is it perhaps Soichi-ojisan^[19]?"

『"Oh, Ayato-kun, huh! It's been a long time! I also watched your match! Uh-huh, it's great that you look fine."

That joyful voice was certainly that of Sasamiya Soichi, Saya's father, who lived as a neighbor.

(Eh.....?)

However, at the same time Ayato felt a little uncomfortable to that voice. Something subtle that felt unnatural.

"Ayato. So that means that this is....."

"Ah, yeah. It is Saya's father."

As he answered so to Julis, who asked in a low voice, Kirin next to Saya quickly bowed her head.

"U-Um! Nice to meet you! I am the tag partner of Saya in this Phoenix, Toudou Kirin!"

『"Oh, of the Toudou school! I have heard rumors; she is an incompetent daughter, but please take care of her!"

"Y-Yeah! It is my pleasure!"

".....So father. What do you want?"

With a slightly embarrassed expression, Saya urged.

『"Oh! Oh, yes that's right! I sent you a new gun; hasn't it arrived yet?"

"A new gun.....? No, it hasn't arrived."

『"Hmm..... Perhaps, it has been stopped at the customs house . Try to check it. I thought you have received it before the Phoenix, but at this rate, it's unlikely to be in time for the first round.

"No problem. With the current armaments, I can fully win through."

As Saya confidently said so with a serious face, Soichi's voice happily laughed.

『"Hmm. Of course! As long as you use my gun, there is no way you would lose! Then, good luck! I'll expect good results!"

As he kept talking one-sidedly, the space window disappeared. This part of him had not really changed.

(Was it my imagination.....?)

Ayato was bothered a little by the uncomfortable feeling of earlier, but since it was nowhere yet concrete^[20], he decided to put it aside for the time being.

"How surprising.....it is a talkative father unlike his daughter, Sasamiya."

"I have stopped that. If I had let it go, he might be talking all day long."

When Saya said so, she closed her portable terminal and left her seat.

".....Well. I'll go to the customs for a little bit to check if the gun arrived."

"Oh, then I will go, too!"

Like that, Saya and Kirin left the room together.

Ayato and Julis, who were left, looked at each other.

".....So, what do we do?"

“Let’s see. For the time being, a toast in celebration of the victory of the first match..... is what I would like to say, but I can’t say such a leisurely thing when we were shown such a thing from Allekant.”

As Julis stood up with a wry smile, she held out her hand to Ayato, who was sitting.

“Let’s go back to the school and train. even if just a little. The second round is in four days anyway. We must do this thoroughly.”

“.....Roger.”

As Ayato similarly revealed a wry smile, he took her hand.

“Hi, hi, both of you, good work! It was a nice performance.”

In the corridor and heading toward the press conference room, Ernesta welcomed Ardi and Rimsi with a big smile.

“Thank you, master.” Rimsi respectfully got down on a knee.

“Fuhahaha! Well, this much is natural!”

Whereas Ardi, with his arms crossed, heartily laughed.

Rimsi, who saw it in side glance, gave Ardi a sharp tripping up as if creeping on the ground.

“Whoa!”

Ardi, who nearly collapsed, tried to recover his balance with quickness unexpected from his large build, but his head was forcibly slammed on the ground by Rimsi, who hopped on his back even faster.

“Umph.....!”

Ardi tried to raise his body, but she did not budge at all.

“What is that attitude towards master? You should be ashamed.”

“It hurts, Rimsi. You were serious, right?”

“Of course. There is no need to hold back to a fool, who is rude to master.”

Rimsi’s voice was cold, but a clear anger could be felt there.

Ernesta seeing it nodded contentedly.

Machines, which analyzed the situation and carried out self-judgment, were not that unusual. There were also already machines, which possessed the thing called ‘free will’. What Ernesta wanted to make was machines, which possessed emotions and could express them.

At that point, while being prototypes, Ardi and Rimsi were already close to Ernesta's ideal form.

"Now, now, leave it at that, Rimsi. It's not as if Ardi really means anything bad. More importantly, if we don't reach the press conference room soon, Camilla would get tired of waiting."

".....If master says so."

As Ernesta calmed her, Rimsi reluctantly released her hand.

The autonomous behavior was perfect and various numerical values were stable, too. It was going well almost too smoothly.

As she got wind of the matter of the other day, the guys of the < Supreme Faction > could not afford to make a bad move for a while , since they seemed to be watched by guards. There was also no concern towards the environment.

As Ernesta chuckled, Ardi stood up and tilted his thick head to the side.

"By the way, master. I have a question."

"Yes, what is it?"

"Rimsi and I should not be that much different on the specs output, right?"

“Right. Well, since the physique difference was made out due to the allocation of equipment and materials available, there is quite a difference in the actual work output data.”

Ernesta leisurely replied while walking.

“Then, why may I not fight against Rimsi?”

“Oh, there is no help for it. The reason is, 『The woman commands nature to preserve in the highest manifestation, and the man commands nature to most optimally fulfill the woman's desires. Even old people say good things.”

It was the famous words of an old dramatist.

“In this world, the woman comes first. It means that you guys also cannot escape from that destiny.”

“In other words, since I am a male type, I cannot win against Rimsi, who is a woman type?”

“It would be so.”

“.....Uh-huh, then it cannot be helped.”

Of course, there was no way that was true.

Ernesta stuck out her tongue in her mind.

That Ardi could not go against Rimsi was exactly because he was programed to use Rimsi as a safety.

Otherwise, it would be dangerous.

“—Certainly, all the past winners of the Festa were mostly women.”

Said Rimsi, who was apparently searching past data, followed up so.

“Is that so”, Ernesta inwardly admired. Since she was not that interested in the Festa, she had never checked such data.

“Well, even the <Venomous Witch> of Le Wolfe, who is the history’s strongest and most famous is a girl. Besides, there are also scary children, who came out from Le Wolfe in this Phoenix, right?”

While saying so, Ernesta slightly tightened her face.

She was thinking that it would be the boy of Seidoukan, who would become her biggest obstacle in this tournament, but there were also other troublesome pairs, who were participating as well. Even in this tournament, which was said to be relatively full of small grains^[21] in advance reviews, had gathered quite the lineup, which could not be taken lightly, when looking at the actual situation. In the end, it meant that there was no such Festa, in which one could easily win through.

Though she did not even consider the possibility of Ardi and Rimsi losing, she could also not deny that there were opponents, who would be somewhat troublesome.

“It would save me if they properly fight though.”

As Ernesta said so, she looked up at the ceiling and slightly smiled wryly.

Chapter 4 – The Violent Vampire Princess

Lamilexia

—Phoenix second day, Central District Commercial Area Outer Edge.

“Um, Procyon Dome..... Oh. That’s it.” as Ayato shifted his attention in that direction and confirmed it's space flag lightly floating above it, a dome-shaped roof peeked out from the other side of several buildings, standing in a row, amongst waves of people.

It was one of the three large-scale stadiums existing in Asterisk, commonly known as the Procyon Dome. In addition to this, there were seven middle-scale halls; the largest main stadium, where Ayato and Julis had their match, was Sirius Dome.

The qualifiers for the Phoenix were held in eleven total stages, leading up to the final, each in various halls and domes. Furthermore, it seemed that between the four large-scale qualifying stages, at multiple locations, and the final stage (main battle); only the main Dome would be used after the semifinals.

In order to cheer for Saya and Kirin's qualifying match, Ayato and Julis were headed towards the Procyon Dome.

“Still, there really are an amazing number of people.....”

With the crowd filling the street, so much one could hardly walk straight, he once again realized how great Asterisk was as a tourist city.

Concerning the Festa; All the cafes and restaurants facing the street were full of people who had opened space windows. Most likely everyone was watching the match broadcast. Since day tickets depended on availability and hall seating capacity it was possible that many had failed to get in.

“During the Festa period, the population density around here usually increased dozens of times. It can’t be helped.” said Julis as even she revealed a fed-up expression.

In addition to the fact that their advance through the crowd was slow, as they were walking, they were often suddenly accosted by fans who cheered or asked for handshakes and autographs, and occasionally by rival fans who jeered, they were delayed even more by unexpected circumstances.

“Although the puppets of Allekant nabbed the top headlines, there is no doubt that you also achieved a fully striking debut. After all, unlike students inside the academy, the fans outside haven’t many opportunities to directly meet contestants.” was mentioned by an anonymous fan.

Though on the other hand there were also fans who occasionally called out to Julis in an overly familiar attitude. She turned down all of them (like she usually did).

It would be easier if Ayato could also do so but since just refusing would be painful, as expected, he couldn't do it.

“*sigh*I wonder how long this will take.”

Even though there was only just a short distance from the subway station to the Procyon Dome, this was certainly at a snail's pace.

As if all that wasn't enough the sunlight, under the blazing sun of midsummer which slowly burned the skin, was of a merciless intensity. Ayato's sweat was pouring out as he wiped it off with his sleeve.

"Their match was the second match, right? If so, then, we can afford a little more time..... Hmm?" said Julis, who was fanning herself, as she turned a suspicious look ahead.

Similarly, when Ayato looked toward the same direction he noticed, for some reason, the movement of people was delayed around there.

Also, faintly heard over the hustle and bustle, there were people's angry voices.

"What, when I was wondering why it was not progressing, it's due to some kind of trouble. Huh....."

There were also people running away towards this place, and they did not seem to be that much calm.

As Ayato and Julis looked at each other and nodded, they pushed their way through the crowd of people, trying to advance.

When they arrived to the front row, several men were surrounding a girl standing in the middle of the street.

Instinctively, because he had been attacked from a similar situation before, Ayato almost raised his guard since they were all wearing the uniform of Le Wolfe. More alarmingly, when looking closer, several male students were already lying on the ground. It already seemed like real trouble.

Just for saying it, in all honesty, the difference in ability between the girl and the men was evident. Here was a barehanded girl, knocking down one after another, men wielding a Lux. The woman, even in this heat, wore a muffler that was wrapped around her neck and fluttering about in the wind as if dancing along with the girl's movements.

“..... That woman is the Violent Vampire Princess.” ^{Lamilexia}

“Huh?”

That nickname also rang a bell to Ayato.

She was the rank #3 of Le Wolfe — and among the participants in this Phoenix, the player named by Julis to be the most troublesome opponent.

If he remembered correctly, her name was.....

“—Irene Urzaiz, I wonder what she is doing here at such a time.I don't think she is sane.”

Julis muttered with a genuinely amazed face.

However, during the period of the Festa, duels in urban areas were naturally altogether prohibited. Of course, it was in concern for the safety of people coming from outside.

In places with a defense barrier, they (duels) would be allowed, but even then it would be restricted to medium to large facilities. However, since those places were all used during the Festa, it was pretty much the same as to say that, for the duration of the qualifying time period, duels could only be done within an academy campus.

And then, since duels were prohibited, such scuffles were of course absurd. If a Festa participant was involved in it, there was no doubt that he or she would be imposed a suitable penalty. If he /she were to be reckless, he/she might even be deprived of the entry qualifications.

“Geez, you’re persistent, dude. Nowadays trying to settle a score isn’t prevalent.”

In the meantime, Irene tidied up most of the men. From the nearly ten men, who were there, only one was remaining.

“S-Shut up! Otherwise my honor will never stand!” The man barked, while backing away, as if to bite.

“With just one or two casinos crushed, you’re narrow-minded people, dude. In the first place, your cheating was the cause. Besides, if you’re that much selfish, you’ll be scolded by that small fatty, you know?”

“As if I care about that damn president! We’ve our own way to—” But before the man finished speaking.

“Geez, you’re annoying.” Irene’s roundhouse kick hit him to the temporal region.

While looking down, with cold eyes at the man who soundlessly collapsed, Irene heaved a deep breath. It was not a movement of someone, who learned some martial arts. It was a flexible and animalistic taijutsu. [\[22\]](#)

“Ora! It ain’t a show!” Irene cried towards the gallery surrounding them.

Her gaze, which turned round, exactly stopped at Ayato.

“Ah?”

Her sharp eyes fixed upon Ayato's face with a stare.

“E~eh..... As expected; It’s the <Murakumo>. Huh. This is good and it saves me trouble.”

Irene let her sharp fangs peep out from her mouth and grinned.

Julis then thought that it seemed like Irene somehow knew about Ayato.

As Irene came, walking briskly, she looked at Ayato so as to appraise him. Ayato didn't really understand but since he did not feel any hostility he remained just as he was for the time being; Before long Irene started to scornfully laugh as if to scoff at him.

“Hmm. That's him. Eh.....”

“Do you want something from my tag partner,
Lamilexia
Violent Vampire Princess?”

Julis broke in there with a displeased voice.

“—The Gruene Rose <Petalblaze Witch>. Huh. I've no business with you. Get away.”

“I can't do that. Since people like you like to pull off scuffles during the Festa period, and what's more, doing so in this crowd is extremely dangerous.”

To these words, Irene's eyes abruptly tapered.

“That was a fight the other side has provoked. It's not as if I started it.”

“Even if it's the case it isn't reasonable to fight back in a public place.”

A threatening atmosphere gradually spread.

Isn't this somewhat a bad situation?

“W-Wait, Julis.....!”

“Interesting. Then, show me what you should have done in such a situation!”

As Irene said that she took a Lux from the holder on her waist and activated it.

“—Tch!?”

Ayato and Julis instantly took distance, and put themselves on guard.

The next moment, a huge scythe so long that it exceeded her height manifested in Irene’s hands.

Its purple blade was somewhat sinister, and it was clad in an ominous atmosphere.

“E~eh, it’s a better reaction than I expected. I see, people can’t only be judged by appearance.”

“That’s..... the Bloody Scythe ^{Gravi-Sheath} of Supreme Destruction.”

Ayato swallowed his saliva.

—An Ogre Lux, of Le Wolfe scholarship, that manipulated gravity.

Due to the fact that the compatibility rating appeared rather high for anyone, which was unusual for an Ogre Lux, it was said to have wreaked havoc in past Festa’s on countless occasions.

In fact the number of people who were able to effectively use it was equal to none. It was still unknown how it was for Irene.

“We are pulling back, Ayato.”

“..... I know!”

It was obvious they couldn't duel here.

“I see, at such times, you would choose to run away. Huh. Smart thinking!”



Though, while Irene was cackeling, a ferocious light suddenly shone in her pupils and she set up the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction.

“—Well, that’s if you can run away.”

A shuddering bloodlust was released and in that instant the atmosphere strained.

A tension that one would, if losing focus, be immediately lost to

Even the gallery surrounding them uniformly kept silent and attentively watched the course of events.

—However.

“Koraa————!”

Suddenly, an out-of-place voice echoed.

“Onee-chan^[23], you are fighting again! Even though I told you many times to behave yourself, geez!”

The owner of the voice was a girl who appeared from the crowd with a staggering threatening attitude.

Her hair, which hung down in a braided cord, was the same color as Irene’s, and their looks were also very similar. She was also wearing a Le Wolfe uniform.

“Crap! Pr-Priscilla.....!”

“When I was wondering why you suddenly disappeared..... How did it become like this? Explain Onee-chan!” cried Priscilla worriedly.

“N-No. That’s..... You see.....” Muttered the suprised Irene.

Though Ayato and Julis were blankly watching the two’s exchange the new girl soon noticed their gazes and hurriedly bowed her head.

“I am sorry! For all the trouble that my sister has caused you... ..!” Priscilla earnestly said.

“Ah, no, it’s nothing.....” As Julis, who was completely taken aback, just returned a subtle answer.

Priscilla prompted her sister. “Hey. Apologize too! Onee-chan!”

“W-What do I have.....!” said Irene who was interrupted by her sister.

“It’s good, just apologize!”

“.....Yea, I-I understand.” Priscilla's almost subdued voice.

When Irene, who was scolded by the girl, stared at Ayato and Julis with a frustrated face, she reluctantly bowed her head slightly .

“M-My bad..... Hey Let’s go.” But Irene’s sister wouldn’t have any of that.

Priscilla, Becoming slightly irritated, spoke again. “Hey! You should properly apologize!”

As the girl put her hand on Irene’s head, she deeply bowed her head along with Irene’s head.

“I am really sorry. Well... I have already advised her.”

As the girl apologetically said so she pulled Irene away and disappeared into the crowd.

“.....”

It seemed that not only Ayato and Julis, but also the gallery was speechless.

“.....Ah, if I’m not mistaken, that child now was..... Irene Urzaiz’s tag partner, right?”

“.....Y-Yeah. Since she called Irene “Onee-chan” there’s no mistake.”

Though both Ayato and Julis had not yet completely pulled themselves together, still when they took out a portable terminal and confirmed the data, there was the face of the girl from earlier there.

Priscilla Urzaiz. Irene Urzaiz’s little sister and tag partner.

In fact, not only was there almost no data on her, but only her name and face were known.

“By the way — why did you behave like that earlier?”

“What are you talking about?”

As she pouted as she blamed Ayato, Julis feigning ignorance looked away.

“Don’t play dumb. Even without such a provocative way of speaking, shouldn’t it have been alright?”

Certainly, Irene was excessively belligerent, but if Julis did not break in, it might not have developed into such a dangerous situation.

Then, Julis sighed as if it could not be helped, and whispered to Ayato’s ear in a low voice.

“Didn’t you notice?”

“Huh.....?”

“Irene Urzaiz turned to me and said: “I’ve no business with you”. It means that she would not have complained even if I hadn’t got in the way. That means she definitively had a reason to aim at you.”

“Even if you say so..... I’m not acquainted with her?”

It was no wonder she knew his name and face. It was evident that they would have data on them (Ayato and the others), and above all Ayato was currently the rank #1 of Seidoukan. It was probably inevitable if he was targeted.

But, now that she mentioned it, he certainly felt that there was something implied in Irene's words.

"Le Wolfe would use any means for their purpose. It would be no wonder if they are scheming something bad."

"Hmm. Well....."

Though he couldn't say that she was thinking too much about it He knew that this city was a terrifying place.

"I wanted to investigate a little more on it, but..... Well, it can't be helped. I never expected that they would seriously do something like this. I'm sorry."

Since Julis frankly bowed her head, Ayato hurriedly waved his hand.

"It's alright, it's alright — Oh yeah! More importantly, if we don't hurry, we will miss Saya's match!"

As he suddenly came to his senses and checked the time there was, already almost, no time left before the match start.

"Oh, that's right. For now we'd better hurry to the hall."

After saying that they realized that they were in the station and heading toward the Procyon Dome. At the same time they, again, noticed that it was getting a little noisy on the way ahead.

“Geez... What is it this time— Huh! That’s bad! The guards! ”

Ahead, where Julis stared with a wry face, two groups of men, wearing a uniform never seen before, pushed their way through the crowd heading here.

“If it’s the guards, then that means.....E~eh, so that’s the ^{Stjarnagarmr} Star Hunter Guards.”

It was an organization for the maintenance of public order which acted as the policing power in Asterisk.

Although she had heard about them it was actually the first time she saw them.

“As if it’s the time to say carefree things! Let’s quickly run away !”

Taking Ayato’s hand Julis ran in the opposite direction.

But Ayato was defensive. “No, but it’s not as if we really did something.....”

“I don’t want to say it, but anyway, those guys of the garrison are inflexible. Even if we convince them, by explaining this disastrous scene, I don’t know how long it will take.” said Julis who seemed a little bit panicked.

Ayato, who had just listened, looked around at the men lying on the ground.

—I see; It would indeed be troublesome.

“Well.....It can’t be helped.”

Since the guards came from the direction Ayato and Julis were taking, towards Procyon Dome, they now ended up heading away from their destination. It was a worry but there was no helping it.

“Hey! Wait a minute, you two there!” The guards seemed to have noticed them.

Without looking back to the menacing voice, which came from behind, Ayato and Julis escaped into an alley. Then they disappeared into the crowd.

“—Time's up.”

“Right.....”

The waiting room of Procyon Dome, when Saya and Kirin heaved a small sigh, they stood from the sofa. Since they heard that Ayato and Julis were coming to cheer for them, they were waiting for them like this.

“I wonder if something happened.....” Muttered Kirin who was worried.

But just then Saya received a call from her portable terminal.

『"Sorry, Saya! We will be late due to some circumstances, but"

It was apparently from Ayato. For some reason, he was speaking in an unusually low voice.

Kirin, who was behind Saya, also looked at the space window.

“.....The match will start.” informed Saya.

『"Indeed.....I'm sorry"

In the space window, Ayato hanged his head in disappointment

“Well, it's fine. Anyway, when it's over, we'll meet in the waiting room.”

『"Okay — then, good luck. Kirin-chan too." Ayato lastly said to Kirin while lightly winking.

“Yes!”

Then the space window disappeared.

Good luck.

With such a simple sentence, Kirin's expression, which was gloomy a little while ago, transformed into an expression completely full of motivation.

"Kirin, you look surprisingly energetic."

"Huh? W-What?"

Replied Kirin, to the unexpected inquiry of Saya, who's face was thrown into confusion and turned bright red.

Saya lightly tapped Kirin's back and then quickly left the waiting room.

"Ah, p-please wait a minute, Saya-san!"

Kirin hurriedly ran after her, but Saya only advanced down the passage with a laid-back pace.

"Huh..... Saya-san is really lax."

"I'm often told that."

As she revealed a wry smile and lined up with Saya, Saya was expressionless as usual; her fighting spirit could not be felt at all. While it was something enviable for the timid Kirin, she was so nervous that one wondered if she would be all right.

However..... For some reason, somehow, it felt a little comfortable.

『"And now! Here comes the ex-rank #1 of Seidoukan Academy , player Toudou Kirin and her partner, player Sasamiya Saya!"

When passing through the gate and entering the stage, under a dazzling light, the announcer's voice, at an awfully high level of tension, welcomed the two girls.

『"Speaking of player Toudou, despite being 13 years old, she is a super rookie, who took the position of rank #1 after only one month of enrolment! Although she fell from the position of rank #1 a few days ago, her ability is the real thing! No, even looking like this, her calm is indeed different, or perhaps should I say though small, that imperturbable attitude is....."

『"Nana-yan, Nana-yan. You're mistaken something. That smaller one is player Sasamiya Saya. Then, it's rather, the timid one next to her who is the former rank #1."

『"Eehh? Then, is she really in high school? Seriously? Ah..... *cough*. That's very rude of me!"

『"That's why I told you that you should properly look at the documents. Geez."

It seemed like the live reporter and the commentator of this hall were quite unique people.

Kirin's pride suffered. ".....It's extremely unpleasant."

"Hahaha....." Saya also muttered with a sulky expression.

Saya then turned a more serious gaze to the front.

Standing side-by-side, on the opposite side of the arena, was a pair of male students.

The first was a young man, thin with a chord tying up long hair behind his neck, who carried no obvious weapon, and the other was a larger young man who sported a sturdy bald head and a Lux. The school badge on their chests was the "Yellow Dragon"—, in other words, they were students of the World Dragon Seventh Institute.

World Dragon, which was the most heterogeneous of the six academies in Asterisk, had two peculiarities.

One was known as Star Senjutsu^[24], their unique mana-induction capability generalization technique.

The other was the promotion of thorough martial arts.

World Dragon was comprised of many different arts schools jumbled together. Although the various arts schools, which dealt with weapons and were not few, it was expected that it's barehanded advanced combat skills technology should be known as a synonym of World Dragon. Of course, an attack with bare hands was more disadvantageous than when using a weapon, but at the same time it was the only way that could directly transform

prana to an offensive ability, and by combining it with a well-trained taijutsu^[25], it showed an unparalleled strength in close combat.

Actually, as for the two men in front of Saya and Kirin, though the bald young man activated a huge Blue Dragon katana^[26] type Lux, the long-haired young man had no weapon.

“Both of them are non-ranked (outside of the list)^[27], but they seem to be quite strong.”

World Dragon, proud to be of the largest among the six academies, was known for the fact that it possessed many strong students not recorded in the Named Charts. So Saya and Kirin could not take their opponents lightly.

“.....Well, we will somehow manage.”

However, no fighting spirit could be felt from Saya, even at this phase, and she unfolded her Lux in her usual way.

A massive rustic gun appeared in her hands, as she activated her Lux, and the audience made a stir. Though probably because the gun itself was way too large compared to Saya’s height and, actually, this was the comparatively smaller one among the Lux that Saya used. Still, it was slightly smaller than Saya’s height though.

“Um, if I’m not mistaken, that is.....”

“Type 34 wave Motion heavy artillery Ark Van Ders modified.”

The various Lux normally used by Saya amounted to, about, ten types and Kirin had briefly witnessed all of them. Since they made a tag, one could say it was only natural for her to know them, but among them, honestly, there were also some, which also struck her dumb.

“.....Which one would do?” Saya wondered.

“Huh? Ah, let’s see.....I’m fine with either.”

For an instant, Kirin did not know what Saya was talking about, but she understood afterwards that she was speaking about which opponent she wanted to deal with.

“Then, I’ll deal with the big one.” said Saya decisively.

“Roger.”

Which meant Kirin’s opponent would be the long-haired young man.

As Kirin adjusted the distance, she slowly unsheathed her katana.

『“Phoenix, block L first round two sets, match start!” A mechanical voice intoned.

In one bound, at the same time with the declaration of the match start, Kirin moved inside her opponent’s range.

As if expecting it the long-haired young man attacked by releasing a fist.

However — It was late.

As Kirin slipped through it, she aimed at his chest with a chop from a low position.

The young man struck the blade of the katana with his fist and brushed the attack away.

Kirin was unintentionally impressed at that heavy response. Certainly, the fist loaded with prana was indeed amazing. Plus, though unarmed, his movement was consequently fast and provided almost no opening in his attack and defense.

—But.

Even so, compared to Ayato's movement, it was still tepid.

Kirin then altered the trajectory of her katana, which had been repelled, by turning over her wrist, and connected with an attacking chop from an overhead position.

“Argh!” Let out from the long haired young man.

Although the young man did dodge it, by twisting his body, it was only just barely and he clearly broke his stance.

Nonetheless, he released a sharp kick out of desperation, but — Kirin easily dodged it and mowed down Senbakiri^[28] directly horizontal (Parallel to the arena floor).

Along with a clear feeling of having broken a hard object, the school badge announced the young man's defeat.

“Whew……” Released from Kirin

As she swung her katana and turned her back on the young man, who fell to his knees, the voice of the live reporter, which got excited, flew into her ears.

『F-Fast! I should say its expected from the former rank #1 of Seidokan, player Toudou, who controlled the battle in an instant! It's an instantaneous conclusion!』

『Nana-yan! That one is good, but the smaller one is also interesting!』

Kirin, whose concentration was broken by the commentator, also turned her gaze toward Saya.

『Oops, you're right! Here is also a heated evenly balanced battle! And moreover! I thought that player Sasamiya would surely be in charge of the rearguard from that armament, but what's this, she's competing in hand-to-hand combat with all her might!』

—Right. The large bald young man, swinging the Blue Dragon Sword downward, blocking the blow of Saya's Ark Van Ders

Modified gun, resorted to using it like a blunt weapon. The petite image of Saya and her huge firearm was a large gap indeed. However. The visual aspect of her wielding it in hand was a degree of shock that was beyond comparison.

Besides she was not just nonchalantly showing off either. One could see at first glance that she had learned systematic close combat techniques. Such as; how to parry the attack or to find a timing to strike back with a counterattack.

Even Kirin, who was witnessing it for the first time, was surprised.

First, to the height and proficiency of the, gun being used as a sword, technique.

And then, to the fact that, the swordsmanship was similar to Ayato's. — In other words... The Amagiri Bright Dragon Style.

"Guh!" Guttled out from the bald young man.

While scattering intense sparks, the Blue Dragon katana and the Ark Van Ders Modified collided. It was clearly Saya, who was pushing.

However, Saya seemed to patiently and slowly wait for the time to come. Remaining expressionless as usual, she was indifferently drawing out attacks.

In the meantime her mana dite, of the Ark Van Ders Modified, was gradually increasing its shine.

As he probably understood what was going on impatience appeared on the bald young man's expression.

The young man's attacks became much more severe and the slashing collided with the gun barrel often.

Even so. Neither Saya, nor the Ark Van Ders Modified, were shaken.

And at the moment the shine of her mana dite reached its max–

–

Saya then, at a speed vastly greater than shown so far, promptly repelled the Blue Dragon katana and applied the muzzle directly to the young man's abdomen.

".....<Burst>"

"__"

Vibration and shockwave, similar to what happened in major earthquakes, rolled and gushed out. The young man's body was instantly blown off to the edge of the stage. His scream was drowned out by a roaring sound of the gun and the sound of the young man slamming, with a tremendous force, into the defense barrier. He then slipped down to the ground while smoldering and scorched-like smoke began rising from his body.

The destructive power of all the Lux that Saya handled was not average. If one were to receive it from a point-blank range situation, he would probably fall easy victim.

『“End of the match! Winner, Sasamiya Saya & Toudou Kirin!”

While the mechanical voice that declared victory sounded, Saya, who turned her face towards Kirin, stuck out her right hand, in a classic victory sign, without smiling.

“.....V”

The waiting room was fully equipped with a shower room. The dome was used not only for the current Phoenix event, but also for the Gryps of team battles; The shower room was wide enough to accommodate several people if they were to use it altogether.

Saya and Kirin, who finished their match, were in two of the stalls washing off their sweat.

“Then... Doesn’t it mean that the gun is simply that hard?” While feeling the comfort of hot water pouring down, Kirin asked Saya.

She had been thinking about the question for a while.

“..... Right. In the Lobos transition system, the high output obtained is unstable, and if left as is, the gun barrel wouldn't last (hold). So I converted a portion of the output as an energy field in order to pin it down.”

Saya, who was in the nearby booth was washing her head while speaking.

“That’s why the Lux endured all right even though you fought using it that way. Huh..”

Be that as it may, the reckless usage of exchanging blows with large firearms was probably unexpected.

“.....If I didn’t use it like that, there was no way I could have kept up with Ayato.” Saya said.

As if she read Kirin’s mind.

As Saya told her story. When they were children it seemed, in order to keep up with Ayato's training, she had devised and brought forth that technique

“So it’s not as if Saya-san is a disciple of the Amagiri Bright Dragon Style. Right?”

“I just learned by watching others..... But, well. I was also taught a little by Ayato.”

Kirin tried to imagine the figures of Saya and Ayato in childhood. Since both of them probably hadn't change that much she was surprisingly able to easily imagine them. Though that sight (image) was her selfish imagination she was somehow a little envious.

“.....Still, they’re late.”

“That's right.....”

Ayato and Julis had not yet come by.

“But thanks to it..... We had time to wash off our sweat.”

It was not really as if they had planned something after this. So they could wait leisurely.

“It's time to get out.” As Saya said so, she sprayed the water away by shaking her head like a small animal.

“Oh hey. Saya-san. You should wipe yourself properly.” griped Kirin.

“.....”

However, when she tried to pass the bath towel, Saya stopped and fixedly stared at Kirin.

No. Rather than..... Kirin. It would be right to say at Kirin's chest. “W-What is it.....?”

Going ahead of Kirin, who unintentionally retreated, Saya suddenly stretched out her hand.

“Kyaa!” Screamed, the now totally surprised, Kirin.

However, Kirin hid her chest, at the last moment, with one hand and began defending against Saya's hands with her other.

“Unh”

“W-W-What are you.....!” Kirin was falling back little by little, while being cautious.

But Saya was gradually shortening that distance, too. No matter how huge it was, after all, it was still a shower room. Soon cornered to the wall Kirin ran out ways to escape.

While making her finger wriggle from side to side. Saya's eyes shone mysteriously.

“..... Since ancient times it is said that the chest will grow bigger by rubbing it.”

“That. It’s clearly the wrong way to use it!” cried Kirin, now in a seemingly dire situation.

Kirin desperately repelled Saya’s hand, which was flying about at high speeds, with only one hand and that useless dialogue. At first glance, it looked like a sparring, but in close exchanges, Kirin was better.

In the end, unable to touch Kirin even once, Saya sulked. “..... It’s unfair.”

“E-Even if you said so.....” While still perplexed Kirin firmly wound the bath towel around her body.



“M-More importantly, if you stay wet like this for a long time, you will catch a cold.”

And when she opened the door to get out of the shower room, a space window suddenly opened.

It was the intercom provided in the waiting room. Since the image was one-way traffic, only the voice reached the other side.

『"Sorry, we're late! Are both of you there?"

What was projected on the space window was Ayato who seemed to be out of breath. Next to him was of course Julis who was also breathing heavily.

『"Yeesh. Those guards. I never expected them to be so persistent....."

It appeared to be certain that something happened.

Although an entry permit was given to both of them, it was temporarily disabled since they were taking a shower.

“I-I am sorry, both of you. Excuse me, but please wait just a little more—” said Kirin.

After all, she only had a bath towel on her. As expected, she could not meet them with that appearance.

“.....You finally came, huh.” as Saya interrupted Kirin's words.

However. She opened a space console and quickly cancelled the lock.

“Eh.....?” From the utterly surprised Kirin.

Naturally, the door opened, and Ayato and Julis came inside.

“I’m really sorry, but because we were watching the match by broadcast.....”

「……やつと来たか」
紗夜は空間コンソールを呼び出し、あっさりとロックを解除してしまった。

「え………?」

当然のようにドアが開き、綾斗とユリスが中に入ってくる。
二人は仲良く固まった。



“Geez, you sure took your time.....” said Saya in an annoyed tone.

When the two people stepped into the waiting room they immediately stiffened together.

Kirin. also similarly. stiffened at the entrance of the shower room.

Only one person, Saya, walked towards the two of them with a calm face and said with a slightly proud expression.

“.....We won.”

Afterwards, it went without saying, Saya seriously received a sermon from Julis.

—Fifth day of Phoenix, Sirius Dome.

“Well then—” As Julis stretched her body on the stage.

Ayato turned his head and lightly laughed.

“Since I left everything up to you in the first round; this time, it’s my turn.” prompted Julis.

“All right. Then, I will take it easy this time.”

As Ayato replied to it with a wry smile and lightly tapped Julis' back.

『"Well then, finally the Phoenix has also entered the second round from today! In the second match, which would be held here in the Sirius Dome, we will first introduce the pair, which broke through the first round by displaying an overwhelming ability, the Seidoukan pair Amagiri Ayato & Julis-Alexia Van Riessfeld!"

『"Though the first round was clearly player Amagiri's monopoly, I wonder how the second round will turn out. I look forward to see it."

While hearing the voices of the reporter and the commentator, which became something familiar in these several past days, Julis turned her gaze to the opponents.

It was a twin tail girl and the ponytail girl in the tag of rank #37 and rank #54 of Queen Veil Girl's Academy. As expected both of them, preeminently, had a well-featured appearance.

If asked the question "which is the strongest academy in Asterisk?", the answer would vary from one person to another; but if asked the question "which is the weakest academy in Asterisk?" Most people would answer Queen Veil. In fact it was only once, even in the long history of Asterisk, that Queen Veil had won a championship.

However. The word 'weak' was not necessarily directly connected with the word 'unpopular'. When comparing simple

sports-fan stats Queen Veil had maintained a continuously high rank since its foundation. Disregarding the general results of Festa ; Queen Veil only considered the Festa as a stage for purely displaying their students' charm. It was just that which led to their popularity.

As the only girl's school among the six academies it was also the smallest academy. Establishing its own standards on the conditions of admission it was said to be the most difficult academy to enroll in. It was an academy of goddesses trying to find an ideal through beauty and strength.

Queen Veil Girl's Academy was just such an academy.

"Really, what amazing cheers....."

While grumbling so, Julis activated Aspera Spina.

Today's hall was wrapped in deafening thunderous cheers, but the voices cheering the players of Queen Veil were clearly louder.

"Everyone, thank you!"

"We will do our best!"

The two girls of Queen Veil waved their hands with an amiable smile in response.

Though the twintail girl unfolded a twin swords type Lux and the ponytail girl a spear type Lux, contrary to their cute looks, they left no opening in their way of handling them by their stance.

Queen Veil might certainly be the weakest if seen from the Academy's perspective. However, that lay only because their carefully selected principles, of participation, framed by the Festa, were rarely fulfilled. Not because the students were themselves weak.

As a proof; The rank #1 of Queen Veil had left with the good results of being the runner-up in the last Lindvolus.

"Ayato, you stay out of it."

"Understood."

Still, Julis calmly puffed her chest with confidence.

At the same time, the school badge on her chest announced the match start.

"Let's go!"

It was the twintail girl who first attacked. Though she cut towards Julis she easily blocked it with the thin sword in her hand.

"—It's nothing compared to Ayato's or Kirin's sword"

"Eeih!"

Furthermore, though the ponytail girl joined in, Julis' taijutsu completely repelled her attack.

In her recent past special training Julis grew, more than anything, in the area of her close combat fighting skills. Of course

she was not yet on the level of being able to cross swords with Ayato or Kirin but still, if against an average opponent, or even taking two people like this, she could handle it enough.

In the first place, although long-ranged attack was Julis' forte, her thin sword skill was quite high. Perhaps it was because she had learned the basics from childhood.

"You!"

"Bloom proudly — Great ^{Anthurium} Crimson Heart Blazing Shield!"

The sharp thrust, which the ponytail girl released, was repelled by a shield of flame which manifested.

"Kyaa!"

"Waah, are you alright?"

The twintail girl supported the ponytail girl, who was blown away; at that chance, Julis greatly jumped back.

"Well, now it's my turn to attack."

Mana rustled around Julis.

"O flames of Trochia, over the ramparts, burn down the nine calamities—"

The flame, which blew up, wound into a swirl, and nine fireballs, in the form of a lovely primrose, appeared around Julis.

“Bloom proudly — Dancing ^{Primrose} nine-spirering-flower!”

It, which was dancing like a firefly, attacked the tag of Queen Veil along with Julis’ shouting.

“Nkya!”

Cried the ponytail girl who could not fully dodge the three-dimensional attack from multiple directions..... Her school badge shattered.

While the mechanical voice announced her partner’s defeat the twintail girl was cutting away at the fireballs, one by one while dodging them, and somehow managed to reduce their number.

“Humph! This much, even I.....!”

The moment when the girl cut off the last one and proudly stuck out her chest.

“Come out — Falling ^{Semiserrata} Crimson Flower of Molten Sky”

In response to Julis’ words, a magic circle emerged at the girl’s feet.

“Eh.....?”

Installation (setting) type ability — in other words, a trap.

「私の設置型能力では最高火力の技だ、存分に味わうがいい！」

「くそっ！」

イレネが逃げ出そうと走り出すが、間に合っはずもない。

「縦^{ほころ}べ

「大^ラ輪^ヲの爆^シ耀^シ華^ァ！」



Julis had cleverly led the girl, up to there, by using the fireballs.

Over the head of the girl, who looked up in blank amazement, a huge flame Camellia^[29] opened its bud.

“Eeeeeeeeh!?”

The girl hurriedly ran off to escape but it was already too late.

The flame flower exploded, at the same time it fell, and the girl's figure was easily swallowed by it.

“End of the match! Winner, Amagiri Ayato & Julis-Alexia Van Riessfeld!”

The mechanical voice announced the end.

When the blast and swirl of flame soon settled, the girl, who lost consciousness, was lying on her back right there.

『"Th-This was once again a one-sided development! Moreover, a solo performance of player Riessfeld this time! Oh dear, this tag, we still can't see its bottom! After all, in this Phoenix, which is a tag battle, both of them haven't yet fought together..... I wonder about this."』

『"No, in order to conceal their ability as a tag, it was an effective strategy in itself. There are also some cases in the past.』

More importantly, player Riessfeld is a tricky player. Anyway, since her ability is variegated, I think that being able to expediently cope with it is also her forte. Especially the last....."

The commentator, seeming to have indeed seen well, minutely explained the process, in which Julis induced the girl up to the time and place of the trap.

"Phew..... Well. Something like that." Julis, commenting on her own performance.

"Good work, Julis."

As Ayato met Julis with a smile, he raised his right hand.

Julis also seeing it revealed a smile, made a delightful sound and exchanged a high-five.

"Geez, don't they know how to give up.....? They just repetitively ask foolish questions."

When finishing the winner interview, which dragged on as usual, and returning to the waiting room, Julis sighed and sank her body into the sofa.

"Hahaha..... Well. They can't help it since it's their job."

Ayato gave a troubled laugh While prepared the tea.

“Oh, come to think of it, today’s match, there was one thing that bothered me.....”

“Hmmm?” Poised Julis.

“Julis, did you happen to recite something, like an incantation, before?”

It was the time when she used the Dancing nine-spirering-flower in today’s match.

“Ah, that, huh. That was, well, let’s say it was fan service from me. Such things seem rather to be popular with the gallery.”

“E~eh.”

He was a little surprised at this. It was because he was thinking that Julis was rather extremely distant from the mind-set of that kind of services.

“You don’t need to be so surprised. Even I have considered my position. If I enter the stage I will, at least, do that much service. Of course, when I can afford it that is.”

Saying so, she shrugged her shoulders.

“The process necessary for the activation of the ability varies from person to person. Speaking in theory there is no need for vocalization before an action but there are also some people that

won't be able to activate it if they don't have a fixed procedure. Even I, who said thus, the incantation aside, it's rather easy for me to hold an image because of the vocalization."

"I see....."

While drinking tea Julis turned an implying gaze to Ayato.

"In the first place, even you shout the name of your techniques, right?"

"Oh.....That's, yeah, something like a habit. It's because in childhood, when I was training a lot with Saya, She said that it's cool like that."

"E~eh, it was for such a reason, huh."

Since he was prohibited, from being in attendance with other pupils during childhood, it was only Saya and his older sister who were participating with Ayato's training. In addition, since he was not allowed in the dojo, he was mostly only training by using a Lux for self-defense, with a minimum of power, on the neighboring mountain.

When thinking about it now it was a kind of an extension of play; That was probably why his father was also turning a blind eye to it.

"Oh, by the way, what will we do for the rest of the day?" Julis asked with the teacup in one hand.

Ayato folded his arms and began to think.

“Mmm, in reality I would like to go cheer for Saya and Kirin-chan but, as expected, we won’t make it in time if we go now.” pondered Ayato.

“Well, the match would be over by the time we arrive at the hall.” concluded Julis.

Today they weren't with Saya and Kirin because both of them also had a match close to the same time but at different Domes.

The first round was held over four days, but the second round would be held over two days. Since the third round would end in one day, unless they had a match in the same hall or the time of their matches were very much separated, it was difficult to go cheer.

“B-Besides. We haven’t even had lunch yet. Right?”

“Oh, now that you mention, it’s true.”

Certainly, they did not have lunch because of today’s match time.

Although he did not particularly even mind until he said it, as soon as he noticed so, he suddenly felt hunger; well human is a mysterious thing.

“Then, let’s first get it over with somewhere—” As Ayato started saying but was interrupted.

“Ahem!”

Julis strangely coughed unnaturally.

“.....Julis?”

“Uh.....actually, um.....well. I have prepared this for today.....” Julis hesitantly spoke.

She then took out a large basket from the waiting room's locker.

“Eh, don’t tell me this is..... A bento?” Came from the suprised Ayato.

“Y-Yeah. Well, something like that.” she said while averting her gaze in embarrassment.

Julis readily held out the basket.

Though he also spent time in training with Julis, until the day off, this was a first. Even in the academy Julis was basically one of those who mainly ate in the school cafeteria. — Though students who were preparing their own lunch were quite a minority— He had never heard that she cooked.

And. Incidentally, he had never thought, up until now.

“Ah.....perhaps this is because Saya and Kirin had made a bento the other day?”

Since the unyielding spirit of Julis was staunch, there might have be some other things to consider.

“It-It’s not really because of that! This is..... Right. It’s just a whim!”

However, Julis’s face turned bright red as she denied it.

“Hahaha. Is that so? Anyway. Thank you. Then, let’s eat, without delay.”

“It-It’s something simple. Don’t expect too much.”

As he opened the basket while returning a wry smile to Julis, who reminded so, sandwiches of lovely size lined up there.

“E~eh, it’s sandwiches, huh.”

The ingredients were a standard line-up such as ham and lettuce, eggs and bacon. He picked up an egg sandwich from the box and put it into his mouth.

“.....H-How’s it?”

On the face of Julis, who nervously asked so, anxiety was clearly visible.

“—Yeah. It’s delicious.”

It was his frank impression.

Since he did not usually eat that many sandwiches there was nothing to compare it to but the way that the pepper moderately worked was of Ayato’s taste.

“I-Is that so!” A joyful expression suddenly spread over Julis’ face.

Though, when she noticed Ayato’s look, she soon turned her back.

“But, Julis can also cook, huh. I didn’t know.”

“W-Well, this much is nothing.”

Even with her back turned, one could understand that she was proudly puffed up.

Such a part of her was really cute.

“And, won’t you eat, Julis?”

The quantity of sandwiches settled in the basket was clearly too much for him to eat up all alone.

It was probably made for two persons, but Julis did not quite touch it.

“No, of course I will eat, but.....”



As Julis said so, she turned to Ayato for an instant with a look, which seemed to want to say something.

“.....?”

Though he was pondering “what?” she was saying “this”. He didn't really know what she was trying to say.

As she became irritated in the meantime, Julis stared at Ayato with a slightly sullen face.

“.....It's not good to be unfair, you know?”

“Unfair?”

“Like I say. Ah..... Don't you think that it's unfair that you did it for Sasamiya and Kirin, but you don't do it for me.....? No. It's not like I really want you to do it to me. But.....”

Though Julis was mumblingly saying so in a low voice, he finally noticed then.

Was it perhaps about that?

“Err. Perhaps..... Um. Julis too?”

“.....”

Though Julis quickly turned away while blushing, she did not deny.

“T-Then. Excuse me.....”

As Ayato softly put his hand on Julis’ head, he gently stroked it. The fragrance of flowers softly tickled his nose. Maybe because there were just the two of them, he was somehow embarrassed.

It was probably the same for Julis. Julis’ face, which was already red, had dyed further red.

One wondered how long they would be able to stay like this.

Since both of them were silent, without grasping the sense of time, they did not know when to stop.

“O-Oh, yeah! How about we look at what happened to the matches of others while finishing lunch.....” Julis said after a while to change the topic.

She then turned and opened a space window.

“Ah. Yes. There seems to be a lot of noteworthy matches today.”

Although Ayato guessed it and withdrew his hand, he was somehow troubled.

He reluctantly picked up another sandwich. It was delicious after all.

“Woops.....!”

Suddenly, Julis’ finger, which was turning the channels, stopped.

“—I see, those guys also have a match today, huh.”

As he turned his look toward Julis’ voice, which was somewhere tinged with earnestness, a male student with a stature like a rock dressed in the uniform of Seidoukan was reflected on the space screen.

And standing off against him — was a schoolgirl from Le Wolfe with a huge scythe.

“.....Listen, Landy. Don’t get impatient.”

While setting up Bardiche Leo, Lester McPhail called out so to Landy Hooke behind him.

“I know Lester. First gain time as much as possible. Right?”

“Yeah. As long as you properly divert it’s all right.”

Time-buying was a strategy, which was not like him, but it could not be helped in this case.

After all, the opponent was the rank #3 of Le Wolfe. He did not want to admit it but she was far above him.

“—Yo, did you say you’re Lester?”

Then, the opponent — Irene Urzaiz called out to him in a strange and carefree way.

Even though the match start was already declared, with the huge scythe — the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction still on her shoulder, she did not take a stance.

“.....Do you have any business with me?”

While carefully measuring the distance, Lester briefly answered.

From the recent events here — especially from his severe defeat — Lester had at least learned one thing: avoiding being reckless.

“You’re <Murakumo>’s buddy. Right? Since, it’s a good opportunity, tell me a little about him.”

“Huh?”

To the unexpected question, Lester unintentionally knitted his brows.

“Not that I’m particularly interested, but since it’s a rare chance.”

“.....I don’t know why you asked something like that, but you misunderstood two points. First, he and I are just merely students of the same academy and we’re not friends or whatever.”

Lester, who said so with an amazed tone, reestablished Bardiche Leo and pointed it to Irene.

“And second. I came here to fight. Not to do worthless chattering!”

“Whew.....Is that so? Sorry for that.”

As Irene shrugged her shoulders, after turning the Bloody Scythe of ^{Gravi-Sheath} Supreme Destruction round and round, she planted its butt end in the ground.

“Then, let’s begin as you wish.”

A ferocious smile floated on Irene’s face, and the Bloody Scythe of ^{Gravi-Sheath} Supreme Destruction raised a groan like some beast.

“Landy! Run!”

Lester himself also started running while saying so. However, it was not as if he indiscriminately ran. Taking distance from the right hand while going around greatly, he looked for a chance.

The Bloody Scythe of ^{Gravi-Sheath} Supreme Destruction used by Irene was a powerful Ogre Lux with the ability of gravity control.

But it did not mean that there were no openings which could be taken advantage of.

First and foremost was the fact that its ability was already widely known. Thanks to that, to some degree, counter-measures could be taken.

It seemed like the ability of the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction did not designate the target itself; it was the type which demonstrated ability for a target coordinates. In other words, without staying at a same place, and if constantly moving, one could position themselves outside its targeted area of effect.

And one could say that the greatest weakness of the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction was its huge fuel/mana consumption and the mischief that caused. In Ogre Lux there was something like a side effect called compensation, and the price seemed to be considerably brutal in respect to the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction. The reason being that while the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction passed through many a students' hand those who were able to effectively master it were very few.

(In other words, the advantage will be ours if we drag the match on!)

Though it was Lester's usual strategy to get a swift head-start for a preemptive attack it could not be helped in this case since winning was, above all, most important.

If there was a cause for concern it was the presence of Irene's partner — Priscilla but she hung down to the wall of the stage without trying to move at all. She looked towards Irene with a worried expression but that was it.

Although there was almost no data on Priscilla, judging that she had also behaved like this in the first round, she did not seem to be an active battle member. There was the possibility that she was someone with some kind of ability.....for example, a Strega with an ability of long-ranged attack or defense system; but for the time being, it would be alright just to leave it at 'constant attention' for her.

“*Sigh*..... every last one of them fetching the same strategy...
... don't you have something else?” Irene said as she became disappointed with the challengers.

As she wielded the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction with one hand.

The purple Ulm mana dite conspicuously shone strongly and, at the same time, that shine spread onto the ground of the stage.

“—To begin with, you don't have the ability to do what you're trying to do.”

“Guh!?”

Landy, who was running opposite of Lester around Irene, suddenly dropped to the ground.

The figure he presented was as if he was pressed by an invisible hand from above and his face was painfully distorting. The gravity of the whole area was probably strengthened considerably.

“Landy!” Lester called out.

“Serves you right, now that you’ve flittered about awhile, if you can’t answer to the immensity of this challenge then its come to the end.” touted Irene.

Irene once again wielded the Bloody Scythe of ^{Gravi-Sheath} Supreme Destruction. This time the purple shine coagulated and converged around Landy who now collapsed completely.

“Ughhh.....!” Landy’s face was distorted in pain.

It seemed like the gravity was even further strengthened by narrowing down the range.

“As if I’ll let you!” Lester shortened the distance at the small chance for an opportunity.

When Irene had her attention focused on Landy he swung down Bardiche Leo from behind.

—But.

“.....Like I said, it’s just the usual.”

Irene pivoted with the Bloody Scythe of ^{Gravi-Sheath} Supreme Destruction and danced in the air; she drove a sharp kick to Lester’s nape at the same time she dodged the blow.

“Gah.....!” Gaspd Lester.

She threw in, once more, a kick to Lester's abdomen, who dropped down on his knees, and blew away his large build.

"You're a deferment. So wait a little."

Irene, who said so and left, sedately went towards Landy.

"W-Wait.....!"

Ignoring the words that Lester squeezed out, Irene called out to Landy, who was lying on the ground.

"Do you give up?"

"W-Who is.....!" Landy stuttered.

Irene, who was looking down with cold eyes at Landy painfully squeezing out his voice, heaved a small sigh to that answer and casually swung the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction.

"—!"

The arms of Landy which were, somehow, feebly, still trying to get up, finally gave in and his school badge declared his defeat.

"Landy Hooke. Loss of consciousness." The mechanical voice declared.

"—One person down." Irene said with finality.

Irene eventually turned her gaze towards Lester who stood back up.

“E~eh, you’re tough as expected, <Kornephoros>.”

“You bastard..... Don’t underestimate me that much.....!”

Lester concentrated his prana into the hand which held Bardiche Leo. The Prana flowing in reacted with the mana dote and its *output increased explosively*.

It was Lester's meteor arts <Blast Nemea>.

“Eat this!”

Instantly the glow of his battleax of light swelled more than double its normal size and its terrifying blow rushed out to meet Irene.

“Tch!”

Of course it was not something that she could receive directly so Irene defended against it with the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction. It was just deflected away to the rear.

“How’s that!” He was proud that the offensive ability of <Blast Nemea> was something unparalleled even in Seidokan.

Even if it was not a direct hit she should have been given damage as such.

“Hahaha..... As expected of the rank #9. I slightly underestimated you.”

However the abruptly recovered Irene only slightly frowned.

(Did she jump back and reduce the shock.....!?)

Whether it be the kick earlier or the defensive now Irene's taijutsu was not at an ordinary level.

"I see.....you aren't an ordinary person, who just relies on her weapon, huh."

As Lester motivated himself, he once again re-adjusted the distance.

It was painful that Landy was defeated, but it turned out well as a strategy. If he let her use the ability like that her limit should come before long. Until then—

"Tch, I didn't want to reveal the scope on my power in this preliminary battle, but.....it can't be helped. In consideration of your ability; I'll show you a little bit of seriousness."

"What.....?"

Lester frowned at Irene's words.

The ability of the Bloody Scythe of ^{Gravi-Sheath} Supreme Destruction was generally known. Like, just a little while ago, it was used to increase gravity intensity and manipulate the direction of gravity. It could be put in practical use in various ways but it was not known that there was anything more than that.

(Is it a bluff.....?)

As Irene approached Priscilla with disregard to the dubious Lester, she gently embraced her.

“Onee-chan.....”

“My miscalculation Priscilla. I’ll just take a bit.” As Irene said that she opened her mouth widely where-from two sharp shining canines grew eerily.

Irene gently pierced into Priscilla’s neck with them.

“Ahn.....!?” Moaned Priscilla.

In front of a stunned Lester, the
Bloody Scythe of ^{Gravi-Sheath} Supreme Destruction in Irene’s hand brightly shone. It looked as if it was trembling in delight.

“Phew.....” Expressed the revived Irene.

Before long Irene released her bite and although the dripping blood dyed Priscilla's chest red it stopped almost immediately and the wounds closed visibly. Although a small scar was left on her neck it had healed.

“..... The Bloody Scythe of ^{Gravi-Sheath} Supreme Destruction, you already know, requires blood as the price for its ability. However, the fuel consumption is extremely high and if used normally I’ll be dried

up in a blink of an eye. Therefore the user's body is deteriorated in this manner until they are ingested completely from the outside. It's truly a scary Ogre Lux. Huh."

While giggling, Irene set that
Gravi-Sheath
Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction.

"Well, that said, it seems that if one's compatibility rating is not very high it won't happen though."

"I see.....just like a literal vampire, huh." Lester could not hide his surprise.

Though he still could not afford to pull back and brandished Bardiche Leo while concentrated his Prana.

His aim was to counter with his meteor arts.

"Well then let's go.....!"

As Irene wielded the Bloody Scythe of Gravi-Sheath Supreme Destruction spherical objects, which were dark purple, appeared around it; the sizes would be about an armful, three in total, and were softly floating around Irene.

"—Go, <Triple Tres Fanega Destroyer>!"

The spherical objects, started moving quickly and still picked up speed, attacked Lester at high velocity.

But Lester, who tried to dodge at once, was amazed at the fact that his body didn't move as he wanted. His body was heavy as if a lead was attached to it.

“I slightly strengthened gravity..... Oh. Know that its effective range is this whole arena. You can't escape.”

“Guh!”

Although he somehow dodged the first in a hairbreadth, he stopped the second and the third with Bardiche Leo, since he was unable to avoid them.

At the moment of interception the purple spheres swallowed Bardiche Leo, reducing in an instant, and burst it open with a spittle like effect.

“Hahaha. If you want to stop my gravity spheres, it's futile unless you have at least an Ogre Lux.” boasted Irene.

“Damn it!” Lester exclaimed bitterly.

It was out of the question while empty-handed.

Attempting to activate the spare Lux, he reached for the waist holder, but at that moment the gravity instantly increased dramatically.

“Guaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

Unbearably, pressing Lester down to the ground, his whole body creaked due to the extent of the high gravity and it felt like it would cave in.

“—Well, do you still want to continue? <Kornephoros>.”

Before he knew it, the blade of the
Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction was suddenly applied to his neck.
Gravi-Sheath

Though it was already hard for Lester to even squeeze out words, while gritting his teeth, he only raised his eyes and glared at Irene.

He wanted to lash out at her with at least one last blow. Which was about what he was thinking. But..... He shivered when he saw the passionless eyes of Irene looking down at him.

This was because of a cold light, which could not be regarded as human, was dwelling inside them.

If he were to resist here Irene would probably mow down his neck without hesitation.

Of course, if she were to do something like that, there was no doubt that she would be immediately disqualified.

Nevertheless he certainly felt, the suggestive presence of, an evil atmosphere.

“.....Understood. It’s my defeat.”

Along with the heavy breathing, Lester muttered.

“End of the match! Winner Irene Urzaiz & Priscilla Urzaiz!”

While listening to the sentence of mechanical voice, Lester thoroughly chewed his molars.

Chapter 5 – The Sisters of Le Wolfe

—Phoenix seventh day, Sirius Dome.

『"End of the battle! Winner, Amagiri Ayato & Julis-Alexia Van Riessfeld!" Rang out the, by now familiar, announcer.

As Ayato and Julis simultaneously deactivated and stored their weapons, a huge wave of cheers engulfed the stage.

『"Well! As expected, those two are strong! The Amagiri/Riessfeld pair, which had advanced to the first and the second round with an overwhelming strength, splendidly succeeds in qualifying to the main battle round from block C!"

『"Well! It was also a landslide victory this time. I look forward to see what kind of fight they will show us in the main battle."

The opponents of the third round were the tag of World Dragon , but Ayato and Julis respectively took on each opponent and brought them both down at the same time.

Although it indeed took more time than the first and the second round, it was still a complete victory.

"Phew..., I guess for now, with this win; It's the qualification."

"Yeah. It's going well so far. But; The real thing begins from here."

Since, by design, the individual prominent player tags were distributed between the four blocks, so they did not meet until the qualifier, it was actually not too difficult for such players to reach the main battle.

However, since it's natural these prominent players would compete ferociously starting from the fourth round on up to the main battle, it would immediately become a brutal and likely savage contest.

“There seems to be no surprise this time, the members of each academy will probably advance, as expected, to the main battle. Afterward follows the Combination^[30].” Julis said with a serious face.

As they were now heading to the press conference room from the stage.

“Tomorrow will be the announcement. I hope that there won’t be something like suddenly confronting Saya and Kirin.”

From the fourth round a new tournament table would be set, but unlike the qualifier, it would filled by the drawing of lots.

Tomorrow would be a complete rest day with no match. Even the drawing of Combination would be performed by the representatives of each academy.

“It would be good if we, as well as Sasamiya and Toudou, don’t confront Allekant's puppets early. I first want to know the scope of their power even if just a little.”

The tags Saya/Kirin and Ardi/Rimsi had already succeeded in advancing to the main battle.

“And if possible, I also don’t want to confront the twins of World Dragon, and the true Knights duo of Garrardsworth. And moreover — the Violent ^{Lamilexia} Vampire Princess, too.”

Said Julis' with something earnest mixed in her voice.

Irene, who had defeated Lester and Landy, had not yet finished the third round, but it was almost certain that she would reach the main battle.

“I never expected that her ability was so effective. Honestly in one-on-one, I don’t feel like being able to win... How about you?”

“Mmm...if it’s purely in close combat, I guess.”

Originally, it was hard to call the scythe an excellent (superior) weapon. Since, its attack pattern was extremely limited, the demands on its user high, it was easy to handle an opponent wielding it. Irene, however, seemed to compensate it with her Taijutsu, rather with her innate body spec, but in normal fighting of crossing swords, even under technical examination, there was no doubt that Ayato would be advantageous.

Be that as it may, since the opponent also had an ogre lux, it was impossible to know if the Demon Sword of The Black Furnace's ability would be effective. If so, he should judge that it would be difficult to one-sidedly chop (cut down the opponent).

"As far as I can see from the data, the effect of the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction's ability seemed to also extend to the user itself. In close combat, she can't be too drastic, but..."

In other words, it meant that in case that he also entered the high gravity area, they would be crushed together. Ayato thought.

In fact, the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction itself seemed unaffected; so it seemed that he would not have any problem as long as he attacked without stepping in.

"—However, it's above all the existence of her little sister that is a threat. To think that she is a Regenerative."

While advancing along the passage Julis grumbled so with a sigh.

A Regenerative was a kind of Strega or Dante, who, as the name suggested, was able to restore their wounds. It was not to the extent of a psychic healer, who could heal others' wounds, but it was still considered an extremely rare class ability.

"Though the abilities of Regeneratives range in all scopes, hers is quite something. Let alone wound restoration, if she is able to even regenerate blood lost, then she is the highest class. She is

probably even able to regenerate lost parts of a body. It's an unexpected hidden card."

Though the national registration was obligated to disclose those with such abilities, and the information was published throughout the world, this did not apply to countries where government functions were not perfectly working for of various circumstances. Irene's and Priscilla's hometown region was exactly that kind of country.

"To think that they cover for the badness of mana consumption of the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction^{Gravi-Sheath} in this way... Really, I don't know if I should be amazed, disgusted or in admiration."

Anyway, one could say that the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction^{Gravi-Sheath}'s greatest weakness could be covered that way.

"Oh well. Anyway. That's after the Combination will be announced tomorrow — Oh, speaking of tomorrow, do you have any plans?"

"Since it's a rare occasion, I intend to go see the drawing, but..."

"Hou, it's a curious case."

Since tomorrow was a rest day, there was also no training schedule.

He was invited there by Claudia, who participated in the drawing.

“What about you, Julis?”

“Yeah, recently my hometown is annoying in various ways. I intend to settle all kinds of formalities and communications.”

Though Julis said so with a tedious face, she suddenly stopped.

And turning to Ayato, who slowed and stopped, she asked as to confirm.

“I will tell just in case, but...please, don’t get involved in any trouble, okay?”

The Combination drawing was held in Sirius Dome with which Ayato became completely familiar with.

“How do you do, Ayato? Welcome.”

Near the stage, but a booth seat, which was separated from the general audience seating.

When he entered there by following the passage, which was told to him, Claudia welcomed him with a smile.

“There was such a seat, huh. I didn’t know.”

Though by no means wide for a space, it was quite comfortable since there were few seats.

Above all, since there was only Claudia, it was almost a chartered status.

“Because this is a booth dedicated for the student council president of Seidoukan. Please, this way.”

When sitting on a seat as recommended, Claudia, who was sitting nearby, bowed her head.

“First of all, congratulations for the qualification to the main battle.”

“Ah, yes. Thank you.”

Ayato hurriedly returned a bow also.

“I also expect your success in the main battle. Good luck.”

“I will do my best as much as possible...well, it will be difficult since there are only amazing people.”

“Fufufu. That's normal since all the people, who reached the main battle, are players with reliable ability. But as far as I can see I think there are not many tags which can fight evenly with you. That's why this drawing is so important and a heavy responsibility.”

“Oh, which reminds me, is it all right for me to stay here?”

In the drawing, Claudia was supposed to draw lots. He wondered if himself, the one concerned should be leisurely chatting here.

“We will draw last. Until then, there are just boring things like greetings from big shots and the summary of the first half of the competition”

Certainly on the stage someone, who seemed to be a member of the Steering Committee, was making some kind of fervent speech in front of a huge space screen. Apparently, he seemed to explain the comparison between this tournament’s trend and the previous tournament’s; But, honestly, the contents were not that much interesting to hear.

Nevertheless, the audience stands seemed to be full like during a match.

In fact, most of the spectators probably came to see the drawing, so it seemed that nobody was listening so intently.

“Still...it’s been a long time since I have been alone like this with Ayato.”

“Eh...?”

To Claudia, who suddenly drew her body nearer, he unintentionally stiffened.

“Lately I was just continuously buried in work and Ayato was monopolized by Julis and the others... I was lonely you know?”

As Claudia took Ayato's arm, she further glued her body to his.

"No, that's...um..."

Since he was strongly pressed against her rich and soft bosom, Ayato was hanging on tenterhooks.

At the same time, an indescribable sweet fragrance tickled his nose.

Then, in a good timing, a call came to his portable terminal.

"—Oh, sorry Claudia!"

As he separated his body from hers, taking advantage of the call, and opened a space window there was projected the face of Kirin who knitted her brows as if troubled.

『"U-Um, Ayato-senpai, sorry for suddenly calling you...!" Kirin was clearly panicking.

"What's the matter?"

It seemed that some unexpected situation occurred.

As he was wondering what it was and leaned forward Kirin, in a flustered state, continued speaking.

『"Errr, actually today, I have come to the commercial area with Saya-san, but...b-before I knew it, I lost sight of her..."

“Oh... I see.”

With only that, she had already fully transmitted the message, but she pressed on just in case.

『“A-And then, when I contact her on her portable terminal, she said that she got lost...! I-I don't know what to do...”

“All right. Then, I will also help looking for her, so let's meet first. Where are you right now?”

『“T-Thank you! Now I am—”

And then, deciding the location of the meeting with Kirin, he cut the communication.

Since at least Kirin was in a place not to far from where he was he would, probably, immediately meet up with her.

However, the problem was more likely Saya. After all, Saya's no-sense-of-direction was anything less than astounding; In elementary school days when he tried to contact her because she never came back after saying she went to buy juice. There was a time when she had even been lost in the neighboring town across the mountain. Though she would not have indeed gone out from Asterisk, it would be no wonder if she lost her way wherever she went in this huge city.

“Sorry, Claudia. It's just as you heard, so...”

As Ayato looked back while saying so, he was startled.

“...”

Claudia, pouting with a sulky look, was glaring at him.

“E~errr, Claudia...?”

Since it was his first time seeing Claudia like this Ayato could not help being perplexed.

Claudia, usually with smile, calm and compose—

“... Even though it was a rare chance to be together after such a long time.”

Her blaming tone was somewhere childish, too.

No, rather, one should say that it was suitable for her age.

“I was really looking forward to it, you know?”

“Ah, uh, that’s.....”

As the voice of Ayato, who did not know what to say, became hoarse, Claudia suddenly turned her face away.

“I-I’m really sorry! I will be sure to make up for this, so!”

Ayato hurriedly apologized but even so Claudia, while still facing the other way, said nothing.

When Ayato, who was earnestly troubled, was almost at wits’ end wondering what he could do. He suddenly noticed that the

shoulders of Claudia, who still was facing the other way, were slightly shaking.

“Ah...”

“—Fufufu, I am sorry. I overdid it a little.”

With that timing, Claudia, who turned around, stuck out her tongue.

“...Really, give me a break, Claudia.”

To Ayato, who unintentionally sank down, Claudia revealed her usual smile.

“It’s true that I was looking forward to it, but I will forgive you this much.”

“Ugh...”

“That said, we can’t leave Sasamiya-san, who is lost.” She said while getting up.

Claudia then gently opened the door.

“I will wait for you to make up for it.”

“...All right.”

As Ayato replied to it with a wry smile, he left the booth and hurried to the subway station.



“Well then. I think it’s probably around here.”

Ayato said that while looking around the street.

Position-like, they were in the western part of Asterisk, the commercial area outskirts. He contacted Saya’s portable terminal, and from the information they received from her, they narrowed it down from there to this neighborhood—

“We no longer have a choice, but to search on foot.”

“Indeed...”

Even Kirin, who joined, was restlessly turning her eyes around.

Since they told Saya not to move from where she was as much as possible, the situation should at least not grow worse than this.

“For the time being... Let’s split up and search. We have to find her before it gets dark.”

“Ah. Then I’ll look this way.”

“Yeah, I leave it to you, Kirin-chan.”

“Yes.”

As Kirin politely bowed and then disappeared down the other side of the street in a trot.

Although even during the Festa period, since this area was also close to the redevelopment area, there were not that many people that looked like tourists. For the same reason figures of ill-bred lots were slightly more prominent. Another reason was likely because Le Wolfe Academy was close.

When thinking so he did not think that it was rash to have Kirin take a different course of action. He also considered that there were not many people with Kirin's level of skill as an ex-rank #1. Kirin's face and ability were well-known so there probably wasn't anybody who'd dare pick a fight with her.

Rather, the problem was more on Saya's side; when thinking that even some kind of fate was attached he could not help worrying.

About her opponent. —Of course...

Since Saya was basically someone, who did not know how to hold back, when thinking it over, it might have originally been the correct choice to split up in order to find her as soon as possible.

"Judging from the scenery reflected in the space window, it didn't seem to be a main street. So it means that I have no choice but to search the alleys one by one. Huh..."

After sighing once, Ayato entered the nearby alley for the time being.

The alley, which had a somewhat slightly depressed feeling was gloomy and there were not that many people

Ayato returned on his heel because even though he had advanced to a certain extent, it was off without change.

“ — ”

Ahead of the alley, he felt like he heard something like people's voices from the parts that were in shadow.

He stopped and strained his ears.

“Please...Stop...! Let me go...!”

He certainly heard this time. And moreover, it seemed that it was not a very calm voice.

As he erased his presence and quietly observed the situation, one girl was surrounded by several men in the shade of a building.

(That is...)

Moreover, to his surprise, Ayato recognized both parties.

The girl was Priscilla Urzaiz. The men were the guys who had fought against Irene on the street the other day.

If so, then it was probably such a situation.

“Hey, don't shout like that. I hate when it's annoying” One of the men said.

“That’s right. Well, if you want to blame someone, blame your sister.”

“Mm! Mmmm!” Was Priscilla’s muffled voice as another man held a hand over her mouth.

There were five men in total.

As far as he watched the previous scuffle (with Irene) these were opponents that even he could handle on a one-to-one basis. Settling it with power like before was out of the question. Moreover. After having been warned repeatedly not to poke his nose into others’ affairs and if he was to be involved, as far as a scuffle, he would not be able to face Julis. If he were to even be disqualified from the Phoenix as a result it would be irreparable.

On the other hand; He also couldn't pretend to have not seen this.

(Oh well...It can't be helped.)

Ayato raised his voice on purpose and showed up from the shade.

“W-What is it, bastard?”

One of the men noticed Ayato and activated a dagger type lux. His reaction was unexpectedly good.

“No, well, I just happened to pass by, but, could you let that child go?”

“Haah!?”

To Ayato’s words, the men fell into a blank stare.

It suddenly became an atmosphere in which there was no more use in arguing.

“To suddenly come interrupting and say something funny, bro ...”

While the men were glaring at Ayato, they activated their lux one after another.

But, one person among them suddenly pointed at Ayato and shouted.

“Aaah! T-This guy is the <Murakumo>!”

“<Murakumo>...do you mean the rank #1 of Seidoukan!?”

“This stupid bastard? Seriously?”

For a moment, confusion spread among the men.

Ayato did not miss that chance.

As he slipped through the men taking them by surprise, he took the hand of Priscilla who was pressed against the wall, and started running at full power inside the alley.

“Ah! T-This guy...!”

The men who were holding Priscilla reached with their hands but they were just slightly out of reach.

“U-Um...!” Priscilla unintelligibly uttered to her surprising savior.

“Anyway, run for now!” Ayato said as they ran off.

From behind the men were chasing after them while raising angry voices. They would talk after succeeding in escape.

It appeared optimal to escape in the zigzagged alley, but it was actually the opposite.

In contrast to Ayato, who was not familiar with the terrain, the men seemed to know the alleys around here.

“Turn right! The other way drives into a dead end!”

“Contact the leader! Some of you come this way!”

The angry voices of the men echoed from here and there.

It seemed like Ayato was gradually led towards the redevelopment area.

“This is a little bad, I guess...”

If he were to undo his seal, the effect might appear until after the next day. Since Ayato’s match was the day after tomorrow, there was still time, but he wanted to avoid such a situation as much as possible.

—But, when necessary, it would be unavoidable.

As he was thinking about such a thing while running, Priscilla suddenly pulled Ayato's clothes.

Remaining silent, she pointed her fingertip upwards.

“Above...? Ah, I see!”

Ayato, who understood Priscilla's intention, released his power, just for a moment, in a spot right around the corner of the alley. Though a sharp pain ran through his body, without minding it, holding Priscilla in his arms, he kicked the wall and ran up until reaching rooftop of the building at a stretch.

The buildings were not very high in this area. This one was only a four-story building.

“Hey! Where did they go!?”

“Look for them! They should still be in the neighborhood!”

They could hear such voices of the men from the alley below

As they remained quiet as is, the men noisily returned on the way where they came over before long.

“Whew...”

Though it was not necessarily true that those guys would not eventually notice here, it was probably better not to move for a

while. Fortunately, this rooftop also had many shades such as those of water supply tanks, it was ideal to hide oneself.

“U-Um...”

“Ah...S-Sorry!”

To Priscilla, who opened her mouth in a situation, in which it was somewhat difficult to speak, Ayato realized that he was still holding her in his arms. He hurriedly put her down while apologizing.

“No, please do not! Thank you very much for having saved me in that dangerous situation!”

When Priscilla deeply bowed, she took out her portable terminal.

“Errr, so...may I contact my big sister?”

“Ah, yes. Of course.”

Priscilla slightly nodded, and began to operate her portable terminal. Probably so as not attract attention, she had changed the settings of the space window and the sound.

In the meantime, Ayato was spying on a sign below. When he strained his ears, he was still hearing noisy voices from far away, but the neighborhood was quiet.

Or rather, only the whole neighborhood was unnaturally quiet.

(What is it.....?)

Naturally, it was much better than being thronged in force, but this was suspicious in any way. It was better to be cautious.

“Um, Amagiri-san...?”

“Ah, sorry. Did you get to contact your sister?”

As he returned a smile to Priscilla, who timidly called out to him, she nodded as relieved.

“Yes. She said that she will come to pick me up soon.”

“I see. That’s a relief.”

In reality it would be right to report this to the garrison but naturally even Priscilla should know that. If she only contacted her big sister Ayato didn't intend to further butt in any further.

“So... Why on earth did such a thing happen?” Ayato asked.

Although he somehow understood the circumstances, since he did not know all the details, he asked.

“I think that... Those people are men of the casinos in the entertainment district.” Priscilla forwarded.

“Entertainment district?”

“Oh...it’s the common name of the place that gathered illegal shops in a part of the redevelopment area.”

“E~eh...” Ayato pondered.

So. There was such a place in the redevelopment area. Huh.

Since if it was just the casinos, there were a great number of stores, which could be legally enjoyed in the central district, there was probably a good reason to call the stores of that place illegal.

“So, what did the guys of those casinos want from you?”

“A-Actually... It seems that my big sister went on a rampage there a little while ago... It was like a nearly catastrophic situation ...”

Though Priscilla was explaining the cause with her eyes cast downward; he was hardly able to hear the latter half that was explained in a voice, which seemed to vanish.

But still since he understood the general situation, there was no problem.

In other words, they tried to get revenge on Irene, who destroyed the casinos, but since they were completely helpless, they changed their target to her little sister Priscilla. It was generally something like that.

“U-Um, but please do not misunderstand! Onee-chan — M-My sister is certainly violent and quick-tempered, but, she is actually a very, very gentle person!”

Priscilla fervently spoke so while waving her arms buzzingly.

When seeing from her figure that she dearly loved her big sister, Ayato somewhat became heartwarming.

“Hahaha, I see. —Oh, excuse me for the late introduction; I am Amagiri Ayato. You already know though.”

“I am Priscilla Urzaiz.... My sister was rude to you the other day.”

Grabbing the hand that Ayato held out, Priscilla smiled wryly.

To begin with, each of them was a major contender among the participants of the Phoenix. There was no way that they did not know.

“The truth is that I must be able to do something about that much by myself. But... I am not strong like my big sister.”

Priscilla said with a somewhat sad face.

Although Priscilla was indeed a Starpulse Generation, it looked like she did not have that much battle experience.

Rather, as he was actually in contact with her like this, in the first place she did not seem to be of a character for such things.

“Then, why did you enter the Phoenix?”

“That’s...”

Priscilla was confused, and when she was about to open her mouth—

“Hey, what are you doing there...?”

Along with a sharp voice, an intense blood lust was struck to Ayato from behind.

He reflexively turned around and raised his guard.

Irene, who set up the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction,^{Gravi-Sheath} was standing there after having appeared in the air.

“Onee-chan!”

“...Don’t tell me you laid your hands on Priscilla?”

A clear hostility and strong wariness were blurred in her eyes.

“N-No! I told you earlier, right? That Amagiri-san helped me!”

“Shut up, Priscilla. In the first place, why did Amagiri Ayato help you? That’s what I don’t understand. This guy has no obligation to help you. Rather, since you’re an enemy, it would be normal to leave her, right?”

Priscilla, in a state of panic, explained to Irene, but Irene seemed to turn a deaf ear to it.

She was glaring with her pupils deep dark like the dusk.

“Enemy...? It might be so if on the stage but isn't it different now?”

“Tsk! What splendid words! But I won’t be fooled...!”

As Irene spat so out, she got down to the roof, and wielded the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction.^{Gravi-Sheath}

“I don’t know what you’re scheming, but I will make you regret for having laid your hands on Priscilla.”

“...What a bummer!”

It seemed like Irene was serious.

Feeling a ferocious intimidating air, which gradually stung his skin, Ayato’s hand naturally extended to the holder on his waist.

Ayato was already within the range of the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction’s ability.^{Gravi-Sheath} On this rooftop, where the place he could move was limited, he didn't think that he could escape.

—However.

“Onee-chan... Don’t tell me you’re seriously saying that...?”

When Priscilla broke between Irene and Ayato she scowled at Irene with quiet eyes. Though small her voice let one feel her firm strong will and intense anger.

At that moment light returned in the eyes of the startled Irene.^{Gravi-Sheath} She then hurriedly put the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction on a stand-by state.

“I-I understand! I’m kidding! I’m kidding, so don’t get that angry!”

Irene pushed out both her hands forward while floating cold sweat and slowly shook her head.

“Really? Won’t you be violent towards Amagiri-san?”

“I-I won’t, I won’t!”

“Absolutely? Can you promise?”

“I-I can! I promise!”

“Yeah, then it’s all right.”

Priscilla sweetly smiled and contentedly nodded.

On the other hand, Irene helplessly dropped her shoulders, but she immediately raised her face and turned her gaze to Ayato.

“However — there are two things I want to ask you.”

“...Onnee-chan?”

“It’s just to ask, just to ask! I won’t do anything! It’s all right like that, right?”

“Hmm...”

To Priscilla, who looked at Irene with suspicious eyes, Ayato smiled wryly and said.

“I don’t really mind. So, what do you want to ask?”

“First. Was it you, who took care of the guys below?”

“...? What are you talking about?”

Since he did not understand the meaning of the question, he frankly asked a question in return.

Irene straightforwardly stared at the eyes of such Ayato for a while, but she sighed before long and continued.

“It’s okay, I understand. Then it’s the second, but...according to Priscilla, you happened to pass by this neighborhood accidentally. What business did you have to expressly pass by such a back alley?”

“That’s—”

While speaking, Ayato remembered his original purpose.

“Ah, that’s right!”



As Ayato hurriedly took out his portable terminal, he called Saya. A while after the call, a space window opened and Saya's face was projected.

"Saya, are you all right? Where are you right now?"

『"I'm all right. The problem was settled just some time ago."』

『"Ah, Ayato-senpai. Thanks God, I just joined with Saya-san now."』

Kirin, who suddenly came in frame next to Saya, smiled with a relieved face.

"I see, then it's good."

He heaved a hot breath of relief.

It seemed like Kirin found her before she caused any problem.

『"Where are you right now, too, Ayato?"』

"Oh, I think that it's probably not that far from where you're, but... then, Kirin-chan, let's join at the corner of a little while ago. Okay, see you."

As Ayato finished the communication and kept his portable terminal, Irene and Priscilla were watching with a face showing that they had nothing to say.

“It’s just as you heard, so...I was looking for a friend who was lost.”

“—So he says, Onee-chan.”

Priscilla slightly stuck out her chest proudly.

Though Irene was scratching her head with an embarrassing face, she greatly sighed, dropped her shoulders and curtly said.

“Tsk, I understand. I owe you one.”

“It’s all right. You would have done the same if I were in trouble.”

Ayato’s words came from his true intentions, but Irene shook her head as if it was bothersome.

“I can’t leave it as is... If I don’t quickly settle the debt it’ll be difficult later.”

To the stupefied Ayato and Priscilla, Irene took out her portable terminal after heaving a sigh again, and displayed a space window

.

What was projected was the tournament table.

“Ah, you didn’t know, huh. The Combination of the main battle has already been announced.”

Ayato reflexively searched his name; and when he saw his opponent, he opened his mouth gapingly.

Phoenix fourth round.

In the opponent column of Ayato and Julis, there were the names of Irene and Priscilla Urzaiz along with the school badge of Le Wolfe Black Institute.

Chapter 6 – Power and Price

“I-I-I-It’s terrible. President!”

As Kashimaru Corona jumped into the student council president's room with a pale expression. She then tangled her feet and fell on her face.

The Le Wolfe student council president's room was located in the deepest part of the central school building; Yet, if there was no window, there was almost no kind of ornaments either, just the bare minimum. But not only was it not shabby in the least, but also the sparse furniture was solidly made, and there were just the right things, which let one feel the height and dignity of style.

“.....What’s the matter?” Asked Dirk in an lousy tone.

Dirk, who was sitting in a chair too big for his size, didn't even glance at her. Corona, while in such disarray, was anxiously putting in order the electronic documents at hand.

“Th-That’s... Urzaiz-san suddenly says that she wants to speak to you.....”

In just the spot where Corona said that, while holding the tip of her nose, the door of the student council president room was blown away with a thunderous roar.

“Hyaa!?” Corona went to the floor.

“—Yo Dirk, I intrude.”

As Corona timidly turned around, Irene, who carried the
Gravi-Sheath
the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction in her hand, was
standing there with a fearless smile.

In addition to all this, when looking behind her, the figures of
the guards who protected this room were lying on the floor in a
heap.

“Awawawawa.....!” Corona squalled while crawling on all
fours.

Corona finally reached where Dirk was and hid behind his back
.

“Irene, it may not look like it', but I'm very busy, you know?”

Although Dirk rested his hands, which were processing the
documents, still he was not unfazed at all.

“Is that so? Well then, let's quickly settle that.”

As Irene said so, she casually swung Gravi-Sheath downward.

“Kyaa!?” Corona jumped up and screamed.

The office desk in front of Dirk was cut in two.

However, — as expected, Dirk did not even bat an eyelid.

“.....What do you think you're doing?”

“Oh, that’s my line. I had thought that you were a man, who always keeps his promises.” Irene counterclaimed.

“Of course, I always keep my promises. If I wasn’t, I would have been long ago buried in a grave.”

“Which mouth brawl that!”

To those words, a violent bloodlust was released from Irene’s body, and Gravi-Sheath raised a growl.

But, the next moment, Irene greatly jumped back; she lowered her body and turned a cautious look on her surroundings.

“Tsk, so you also let a “cat” lie hidden here, huh!”

“Unlike you, I’m a frail ordinary person, you know? This much precaution is natural.”

“Cat” is the codename of the students attached to the “Black Cat Organization”, who carried secret tasks under the direct control of the student council. That said, even Corona had never met its members, and did not even know really what kind of organization it was. She had at least heard that it was divided into “silver eyes”, which barely acted within the school, and “golden eyes” consisting mainly of intelligence/work activities off-campus.

As Corona, who was petrified with terror just before, restlessly looked around inside the room, there was no other person’s figure other than Dirk and Irene to be found. In the first place, there was no place in this room where someone could hide.

Even so, as Irene had certainly felt someone's presence, she did not move while cautiously raising her guard.

"So, let's hear what made you spit out such a false accusation."

".....Today, Priscilla was attacked. I won't let you say that you didn't know."

"Oh, that matter, huh."

"Has such a thing happened?" Dirk said in a light tone.

"Don't tell me you're suspicious of me. In the first place, there were people of the entertainment district, right? Originally, it was the seeds that you sowed."

"I'm aware of that. But — in the contract terms I've made with you, there should have been Priscilla's protection included. Don't tell you've forgotten!"

"Of course, I remember. I've already notified not to lay a finger on you sisters, and also told to properly punish the guys, who attacked you the other day. However, there are still many people in Le Wolfe, who don't listen to what I say. You are also aware of that, right?"

"Then... Why leave such runaway guys be? You should quickly take care of them."

As Irene calmed down a little. She sat down, with a thud, onto the sofa while glaring at Dirk.

“Even such people can be useful in their own way.”

“Useful.....? Hmph, well it’s okay. But you know Dirk. Wasn’t a “cat” attached to Priscilla’s protection when I’m not by her side? What was that fellow doing at the time?”

“A “cat” was attached to her. Well. It looks like he was a little late this time.”

Dirk snorted as bored.

“A little late.....you say?”

A dangerous light shone once again in Irene’s eyes.

“She’s a Regenerative anyway. She will still be okay if she suffered only slight scratches, right?”

“.....”

As Irene slowly stood up, while looking downward, she casually set up Gravi-Sheath.

The purple scythe rumbled in her hand with a clattering sound.

For Corona, it looked as if it was laughing.

“—Go to hell!”

A cold voice with no emotions.

However, contrary to Irene's apparent casualness, the slash exercised was so unexpectedly fast as if to tear the wind itself.

The tip of Gravi-Sheath, aimed at Dirk's throat with a high accuracy, changed its trajectory at the last moment as if it was blocked by an invisible wall.

Even so the blade, which had slightly grazed Dirk's cheek, left a red line.

Irene stepped back as to re-adjust the distance, and re-set Gravi-Sheath while still looking downward.

"Hmm, to think that the corrosion would go on until here....."

Dirk frowned unpleasantly — it was like usual though — and curtly stretched his voice.

"Hey... Irene. Who will be in trouble if I were to die?"

".....Tch."

To those words, Irene raised her face as she was surprised.

The purple phosphorescence released by Gravi-Sheath quietly weakened.

"Also about this matter, even though late, he made it in time on the site. The "cat" could not just come out because that Seidoukan boy unnecessarily meddled in. He couldn't afford to be seen by those guys. You also know that. Right?"

“..... But. It’s a fact that she was saved by that guy.”

“I understand. I understand. Then... What the hell do you want ?” Dirk casually said.

As he leaned back in his chair.

“At this rate it’ll inevitably be difficult to fight. I will proceed logically from here on, don’t you dare interfere.”

“..... Do what you want.”

Dirk, with a fed up face, waved his hand as if driving away a stray dog.

“Yeah — Sorry for the disturbance.” Irene briefly said.

As she left the room staggering.

Soon after the atmosphere of the room loosened.

“Haa.....” Corona greatly heaved a sigh. “It-It was really scary.”

However, a moment after she felt relieved, Dirk’s sharp voice immediately flew.

“Hey. Corona. What time is it now?”

“Y-Y-Yes! Errr, it is past 6:00 p.m.!”

As Corona hurriedly stood up, she immediately checked the time and answered so.

“It’s a good time…… All right. Foretell.”

“Eh? R-Right now?”

Corona surprised looked back at Dirk.

“Isn’t it better to do it after cleaning up the room for the time being……”

Thanks to Irene’s rampage, the student council president's room was messy. The office desk was cut in two, the carpet was tattered and the sofa was upside down. Though not very much, it was not a relaxing environment.

However.

“……Don’t make me repeat myself.”

“Y-Yes, I am sorry! I will prepare immediately!”

To Dirk’s voice, which was full of anger, Corona took out tarot cards from the pocket within her uniform and lined them on the floor.

“……So, what shall I foretell?” She timidly asked.

As Dirk folded his arms he curtly answered while looking down at Corona.

“As usual. Do it freely”

“Yea.....”

Though perplexed, Corona sorted the tarot cards according to a procedure.

The fortune-telling was one of the many hobbies of Corona. It was something she was properly taught of, but most of her knowledge about it was self-study. At the level of being crazy about it, and yet unskilled at it, it did not amount to much — rather, it hardly ever proved right. Even so, Dirk would, Just like this, order Corona to foretell almost on a daily basis.

It was fine in its own right. But what troubled her was that Dirk did not say “what do you want to foretell?”. Since the fortune-telling was generally about something that was requested, she was troubled about this every time.

“Ah, then, since it is a rare occasion, I will foretell the chance of success of Urzaiz-san and her sister in the Phoenix!”

Corona clapped her hand to the good idea.

Though at last after being usually so much troubled, she foretold something she herself thought to be useless, such as the side dish for tonight’s dinner or tomorrow’s weather, she found just the right material for fortune-telling today.

“Then, I will begin.....” Corona closed her eyes.

She began to sort the cards by feel.

Then, a pale magic circle emerged around Corona, and a huge amount of mana began to flow.

But, Corona herself unaware of it, chose a card with her eyes still closed, and turned it over.

“—All right.” Corona finished turning over the five cards.

At the same time, which she chose, the magic circle disappeared

Opening her eyes. Corona read the cards that were turned. “Err, the Sun in reverse position to the Fool normal position, and then... ..”

Enthusiastically let her face soon brighten and looked up at Dirk.

“I did it... President! It came out that Urzaiz-san and her sister will win!”

“Yea, I guess.”

As Dirk muttered it as if natural, he slightly waved his hands.

“Corona, go call one vice-president, it doesn’t matter who it is. After that, you may already go back.”

“Y-Yes, I understand.”

Corona quickly put the cards in order, bowed, then left the student council president's room.

Though the student council of Le Wolfe had taken a good form, verging on the dictatorship by the student council president Dirk, it was composed of vice presidents from the first to the third years, and many secretaries. They were an existence, which supported Dirk's work and, in the proper sense of the term, closer to being an office secretary than Corona herself, who was only managing miscellaneous affairs.

"Still, the president really likes the fortune-telling." She murmured.

While she headed towards the student council room which packed within the various VP secretaries and staff.^[31]

On the other hand, Dirk, who was left in the student council president's room, was lost in thought while still keeping his arms folded.

Since Corona's fortune-telling results turned out like that... It became an unavoidable event. He must adopt some measures.

"—It can't be helped, I shall make preparations." Dirk muttered to himself.

He then took out a black portable terminal from the broken Office desk.

It was Dirk's portable terminal and at the same time not. It was an exclusive portable terminal that was allowed to be used by only the student council president of Le Wolfe Black Institute.

Its was limited only to voice communication, without opening a space window, but Dirk operated it with practiced hands.

"Connect me to the Seventh "gold eye"." He briefly spoke.

After a little while it responded with a low gloomy voice.

".....Invite you to dinner, you say? Don't tell me you accepted it?" Julis asked in disbelief.

"Yeah, well." Replied Ayato.

After staring at Ayato's face for a while with a stunned look, Julis feebly sat down on the corridor of the training room and buried her head in her arms.

"Y-You're really....."

As she was at a loss for words, she kept silent as is.

Since Ayato expected her reaction, he didn't dare to make excuses.

Then Julis remained crouched down for a while, but as soon as she stood up, she slowly shook her head from side to side.

“—No, I understand. Since I associated with you, I have to get used to these things. All right, just exactly what I want.”

And then she laughed with a somewhat cramped face.

“Okay, for now tell me once again from the beginning what had happened.”

“Oh, like I said err, yesterday, I found Priscilla-san, who was attacked....., then after saving her I was attacked for some reason by Irene-san..... fortunately the misunderstanding was solved, but, Priscilla-san said that she wanted to thank me no matter what”

Ayato was counting on his fingers while searching his memory.

“At that point, you learned that those two will be our next opponents, right?”

“Yeah, since Irene told me.” Admitted Ayato.

“And knowing that, you still accepted the invitation?”

“No, I also thought that it wasn’t a good idea after all, but, I couldn’t refuse.”

Ayato said so while scratching his cheek.

“Besides, we may be enemies in the Festa, but there’s nothing other than that.....”

“You’re naïve!”

Julis raised her eyes and yelled at Ayato.

“Leaving aside the example of the matter with Cyrus, this city is the haunt of wicked men, who can even catch a weasel asleep. Those, who entrap others for themselves, and those, who used tricks, are a dime a dozen. What would you do if it was a trap?”

“I-It’s all right. Both of them don’t seem to be such bad people Well, Irene-san can certainly be dangerous sometimes though.”

“That’s why I said that you’re naïve. If humans, who plot an evil deed were all villains, one would have no trouble. Don’t trust people that easily.”

Her opinion was quite right.

However.

“Then, how about you, Julis?” Accused Ayato.

“What?”

“We have formed a tag in the Phoenix, but if both of us are to participate in the Lindvolus, it means that we will be enemies, right? At that time, must I also doubt Julis?”

From the beginning, Ayato did not intend to participate in the Lindvolus. Since becoming Julis' strength was the reason for the current Ayato's fight, he was just speaking of an assumption.

"Ugh..... Th-that's....."

It might be a slightly unfair way of saying it, but the effect seemed to be immediate.

Julis mumbled with a complicated expression—

"Haa.....I understand. Do as you wish."

She greatly sighed as she soon gave up.

"However! I just have one condition."

"One condition?"

Julis thrust her finger at Ayato, who asked a question in return.

"—you shall let me accompany you there, too."

The next day. Evening.

The address, which Priscilla gave him, was that of a room of a mansion^[32] in the residential area.

Though it was not to the degree of being called a high-class mansion, it was a neat building with a clean and stylish feeling.

“Since you said that you were invited to dinner, I thought it would be in a restaurant.....why is it in a mansion?”

“No, don’t ask me.” Ayato was surprised as well.

As so. He couldn't answer in any other way.

“I hope that it’s not really some kind of trap.....”

Taking along the suspicious Julis with him, he headed towards the designated room.

Then, the door quickly opened and Priscilla dressed in an apron welcomed them with a big smile.

“Welcome! Ah, you are Riessfield-san, right? I am sorry to not have been able to greet you the other day.”

“Ah, no, likewise.....”

“Now, please come in without reserve. I will immediately prepare the dishes.”

As he entered the room with Julis, who was completely taken aback, there was a table set in the living room, which was neatly

cleaned up, and Irene was sitting in one of the chairs with a sour look. As expected, she was not in her uniform figure, but she was roughly dressed in a T-shirt and jeans.

“.....Yo.” Said Irene, as she turned her gaze to Ayato and Julis for an instant, and soon faced away again.

From the start, since Ayato did not seem to agree with this even though Irene invited him, one could say that it was natural.

Though Irene's attitude was overly contrastive to Priscilla's cordial interactions. It, currently, seemed rather good to Julis.

Her habitual smile full of confidence returned, and she sat down to the front of Irene across the table.

“My greetings, Violent ^{Lamilexia} Vampire Princess. Is this the attitude to keep in front of your guests?”

“.....I don't remember inviting you, ^{Gruene Rose} Petalblaze Witch.” Stated Irene.

“Hmph, as you know, this softhearted fool is my tag partner. I will be troubled if something were to happen to him. So, well, I accompanied him.” Defended Julis.

Then, Irene revealed a teasing smile.

“You seem quite worried about him. Are you his mother or what?”

“W-Who's a mother?”

Julis and Irene were checking each other in that way, but strangely there was not that much a serious atmosphere there. It looked like both knew the boundary line.

While thinking that in a sense they were getting along well, Ayato also sat next to Julis.

“Thank you for waiting.”

Priscilla carried the dishes there.

Many dishes of which were probably appetizers which had been placed upon small plates were lined up on the table.

“There are chickpeas and tomato salad, aioli of potato, fried garlic pepper shrimp, and Segovia style mushrooms.”

“Oh! I was waiting for this!” Irene said, obviously, anticipating her sister's meals.

“Onee-chan! Watch your manners!”

Irene promptly stretched out her hands to a dish with a smile never seen until here, but Priscilla hit and stopped it.

“Eeeeh! Isn't it fine, just a little?”

“It's not fine! In the first place, if Onee-chan is the first to start eating although this is made to thank Amagiri-san today..... Oh!”

“Bon appetite!”

Irene, without paying attention to what Priscilla said, casually picked up a dish.

“Geez, Onee-chan!”

As Julis chuckled when seeing it, she softly whispered in Ayato’s ear.

“I see, it seems that the Violent ^{Lamilexia} Vampire Princess is also a caring person.”

“Hmmm?”

“She probably intends to test it for poison.”

Julis said so and slightly shook her shoulders.

“Hey, you guys should also eat. Priscilla’s cooking is the best, you know?” Irene said, obviously, with a huge appetite.

Irene was continuously stuffing her mouth while while saying so.

Priscilla seeming to have already given up sighed and turned her gaze towards Ayato and Julis.

“I am sorry, both of you.” Priscilla apologetically said.

“No, it’s alright. Well... Then let’s also eat.”

Like that. The meal began without debate and there was no lie to Irene's words.

"..... I- It's delicious."

Julis muttered, who ate a mouthful of mushrooms, as she was surprised.

In fact, all the dishes were very delicious. They were not at all high class dishes, but, they had a homely warm taste which let one feel relieved. Nevertheless, a little ingenuity was properly added.

"Wow. Thank you."

"Fufufu. Right?" Boasted Irene.

Irene proudly stuck out her chest.

"..... It's not really like you are the one being praised, you know?"

Though Julis was amazed, Irene seemed to be above all happy that Priscilla was praised.

"Ah, come to think of it, it's a bit late, but..... what kind of room is this?"

Ayato remembered a question that he had completely forgotten and asked.

Then, Irene who was gulping down a drink curtly said.

“It’s the room that I usually use; what about it?”

“That you usually use..... and what about the dorm?”

All the six academies of Asterisk required all the students to live in its dormitories. As a general rule, it was not admitted that a student lived in the city area.

“There is such a privilege to the Top Twelve of Le Wolfe. Of course, it doesn’t mean I’m saying that openly.”

“So, I also often come here to clean up and cook, but..... However often I said to Onee-chan, she refuses to return to her room in the dorm.”

Priscilla said so and smiled wryly.

“But, it was safe this time. Since after all, I could not have both of you come to Le Wolfe.”

“I should say as expected of Le Wolfe, it has a dreadful freedom

“But, why expressly a room outside of the dorm?”

Though he thought whether the dorm of Le Wolfe was that harsh an environment, he immediately understood that it was wrong.

“.....The entertainment district is near from here. It’s somehow convenient.”

Irene answered with a slightly upset face while energetically eating.

“I see. The business of night amusement, huh.”

As Julis sarcastically said so, Irene frowned further.

“It’s not like I’m spending my time playing. I only make money since I need it.”

“Money.....?”

Julis’s hand stopped to those words.

“Which reminds me, I heard from Ayato. Seemingly, you had trouble with some illegal casinos.”

“.....So what?”

“If it’s only to earn money, there are many other ways to earn it. Why necessary take such risks?”

“Other ways, eh.....then, tell me those ways.”

Irene laughed in a somewhere self-scorn feeling.

“Whether I tell you or whoever, isn’t it for that exact reason that you now participate in the Phoenix?”

“Ah, I see. If I’m not mistaken, you also come here in order to earn money, right ^{Gruene Rose}Petalblaze Witch?”

“Wha-!? How do you.....!”

“The intelligence agency of Le Wolfe is excellent, you know?”

Seeing the flustered Julis, Irene simmered, and rumbled her throat.

“Mmm. But you know... Both our circumstances and positions are different. Even if I were to win the Phoenix, my wish has already been granted. It’s such a contract.”

“Contract, you say?”

To the suspicious Julis, Irene set a glance towards Priscilla for an instant.

“—Ah, then I will shortly go looking after the oven.”

Priscilla left her seat with an ambiguous smile, and headed towards the kitchen.

Irene exhaled after confirming it, and let her chair slightly creak.

“Simply put, I’m the pawn of the student council president of Le Wolfe Black Institute, Dirk Eberwein. Long time ago, I had borrowed a huge amount of money from that bastard Dirk, and already had my wish fulfilled. And then, by following his orders, I’m clearing my debts little by little.”

“The ‘Unscrupulous ^{Tyrant} King’, huh.....”

Julis sank into silence with an unpleasant face.

That name also rang a bell for Ayato. Even in Asterisk, while countless bad rumors emerge from the infamous person amounted close enough to contend for first place, on the other hand, he hasn't once ever heard one good rumor.

"The contract is made so that my participations in the Festa are limited, and that even if I was to win, I would not be able to assign the reward as repayment. Well, he probably wants to use me as his pawn as long as possible. Really, what a nasty bastard, that guy."

Irene said so and shrugged her shoulders.

"That said, I also don't want to work forever under him. That's why, in order to return the money as soon as possible, I make painful efforts night after night."

"Is that debt such a great amount of money?"

"Who knows how many decades it will take to return the money if I were to work legitimately."

It must be a considerable amount.

"—I see. So that means, the fact that you participate in this Phoenix is due to Eberwein's suggestion. Huh. There is a purpose, other than winning the Phoenix, right?"

Irene loosened her lips grinning to Julis' pointing out and looked at Ayato.

“Good deduction. The instruction that I received this time from Dirk is — to crush you, Amagiri Ayato.”

“What!?”

Though Julis promptly stood up, she did not feel hostility from Irene.

—At least, not yet now.

“Why do you expressly tell us that?”

Even if it was true, there would be no need to say it.

“I also have what you call honor, you know? I owe you for having saved Priscilla. At this rate, it would be difficult to settle it it’s like that, so sit down... ^{Gruene Rose} Petalblaze Witch. I don’t intend to dabble here.”

“..... Why does Eberwein target Ayato?”

Though still on guard, Julis slowly sat down.

“According to what Dirk says, because it seems that he wants to crush Amagiri before it’s too late, the Ogre Lux that he uses is something troublesome.”

“The Demon Sword of The Black Furnace? Certainly, it’s a powerful Ogre Lux, but will he go that far just for that?” ^{Ser-Versta}

To Julis’ question, Irene nodded as she also agreed.

“I’m of the same opinion. Dirk is the cold-blooded brute worst bastard, but he’s not incompetent or a coward. Since that guy is that much cautious, there should be some bigger reason.”

As Irene said up to there, she turned towards Ayato.

“I don’t know what Dirk is plotting, but there is one that I was able to guess from his way of talking. It seems like he also happened to meet the previous user of that Ogre Lux, with his own eyes, before.”

“—!”

To those words, Ayato unintentionally half-rose to his feet.

“It’s strange. As far as I have looked into the past loan records available to the public, there should not have been any user of that Ogre Lux in this last decade. And yet where and how did he see it

His heart was heavily beating fast.

In other words, it meant that Dirk Eberwein knew the person, that is Ayato’s older sister — Amagiri Haruka, who had used Ser-Versta before Ayato.

“I thought that around there, there might be the reason why you are targeted, but..... It seemed like I was dead on mark.”

“Well....., yes, probably. Anyway thank you.”

The reason why Ayato came over to Asterisk was in order to discover a goal to seek after. Since his older sister left the house from her own will, there was surely probably some sort of reason there. Therefore, he did not think to forcibly find out about it. It proved how much Ayato believed in his older sister.

Nonetheless..... It would be a lie to say that he was not interested.

And all the more since he found some clues.

“Okay, well then, with this I pay my debt.” Which Irene said with a refreshed face

Priscilla then appeared with a big iron pan.

“Sorry for keeping you waiting. Here is the seafood and Paella mushroom.”

It, which spread a fragrant smell with a sizzling sound, looked quite delicious.

“Fufufu, Priscilla’s Paella is really a great masterpiece. Eat with care.” Irene proudly stuck her chest.

“Stop bragging... Onee-chan. Come on, serve it quickly.”

Priscilla responded with an embarrassed face.

(Onee-chan. Huh.....)

Looking at those two figures, Ayato felt an emotion, which he could not put into words, welling up within him.

“Well, then it’s almost time to go home.”

“Yeah, indeed.”

Having drunk coffee after finishing the meal, Ayato and Julis looked at each other and stood up.

“Huh, already? You can take it easy a little more.....”

“Stop, Priscilla. Even if you want that badly to be friends with them, tomorrow, we will confront anyway. All of us have finished with our business... So it’s already enough. Right?”

Irene said while holding back Priscilla who tried to stop them.

“But.....”

“I don’t like it, but, it doesn’t change the fact that I’m still moving by Dirk’s order. With this... I won’t have to hesitate anymore and tomorrow... I will crush you to my heart’s content. If you don’t like it... You should quickly give up.”

“.....Go easy on me.”

Ayato replied to it with a wry smile and left the room.

“Ah, then, I can at least see you off.....!” Priscilla quickly ran after them.

Irene though, did not feel like stopping her.

“Thank you for the meal today. Priscilla-san. It was delicious.”

“No, don’t mention it, um. I am sorry for everything caused by my sister.”

Priscilla was going to bow her head in a humble manner, but Julis stopped her kindly.

“No. It’s not like I don’t understand the
Violent Vampire Princess’s point too. Don’t think badly of me, but we will also fight with all our might tomorrow.”

“That.....I understand.”

Priscilla hung her head dejectedly.

“Priscilla-san... I see you don’t like fighting that much.”

It might be natural for ordinary students. But when it came to the students of Asterisk City—, and what’s more, the students of Le Wolfe, it should be pretty rare.

But certainly, there was no doubt that Priscilla was a girl who looked more lovely, while cooking in an apron outfit like today, than in an image of holding a weapon and fighting.

Just an ordinary girl, which, one found everywhere. That was Priscilla Urzaiz.

The reason for such a girl to dare stand on the stage of the Phoenix was—

“.....My older sister is fighting for my sake. That’s why I cannot run away.”

“Even if your blood is sucked?”

That sight was quite shocking.

However, Priscilla faintly shook her head to Julis’ words.

“That much is nothing. Since I am only protected by Onee-chan all the time until now, I am glad, that I can at least help her, even if a little. Just.....”

Priscilla stopped her words there.

“Just?”

“—When my older sister is using Gravi-Sheath^[33] she is a little scary.”

As Ayato urged her, she said so in a faint voice.

“At first I thought that maybe it was because she was not yet familiar with the weapon, but.....how should I put it, my sister, while she is using that, is somewhat really berserk, as if she is a different person — and recently, it’s more and more.....”

Priscilla, who seemed to mutter almost all she was saying, suddenly raised her face there.

“S-Sorry! For saying such a strange thing.....”

While lightly waving both her hands, Priscilla apologized.

In the meantime Ayato and Julis, who arrived at the entry of the mansion, bid farewell there.

“See you later.”

They waved their hands to Priscilla, who deeply bowed her head, and left the mansion.

“.....Julis, what do you think?”

After walking the night cityscape illuminated by the streetlights for a while, Ayato suddenly asked.

“About Gravi-Sheath? Well now, from my perspective, I don’t see the difference with when the Violent Vampire Princess is violent normally..... what, don’t tell me you feel needless compassion?”

“No.....No, well, it’s true, but it’s not like that.”

As Ayato pouted, Julis smiled wryly and shrugged her shoulders.

“Fufufu. I’m kidding. I know what you’re trying to say, but — even so, it’s a fact that there is nothing that we can do about it.”

“.....Yeah.”

She certainly had a point.

“We have our own fight to think about. So we should first concentrate on it.”

『"Oh my. Ayato. What is it at such a time?"

That day, as Ayato, who returned to his room, contacted Claudia on her portable terminal, the space window opened after the hold time for a while.

Lately, since Eishiro did not come back for days under the pretext of summer vacation, there was no need to be careful.

“Sorry for suddenly contacting you, Claudia. There is something I want to consult you with.”

『"I am glad to receive a call from Ayato for a consultation. What kind of business is it?"

"—A little about Ogre Lux."

As Ayato said so, on the other side of the window, Claudia's calm face became just a little tense.

『.....I see, then it would be better to directly meet and talk about it. So let's meet now — is what I would like to say, but unfortunately my schedule is still tight. I will finish at a slightly late time, but is it all right?

"Yeah, I leave it to you."

『"Then.....well, let's say at 12:00 tonight, in my room."

"Ugh..... I-I understand."

He wanted to avoid sneaking into the girl dorm if possible, but since it was his request he couldn't say no.

"By the way Claudia, are you all right?"

『"? About what?"

"You look a bit tired."

Claudia had her calm smile as usual, but she looked like she somewhere lacked vigor.

Then, it was rare to see Claudia frankly open her eyes wide with a surprised face.

『"Ara..... You noticed well."』

"Yeah well, somehow."

『"Fufufu, I don't know whether you are really sharp or dull. But... It proves how much you pay attention to me."』

Claudia saying so looked somewhat happy.

『"I was just a little busy with work, otherwise I am all right. Thank you for your concern. Then later again."』

When the space window shut Ayato checked the time. The needles of the watch pointed 9:00 p.m.

"Work until late at night. huh..... It's difficult being student council president."

Since Ayato's match was ahead, tomorrow in reality, he wanted to rest his body a little early. However, it wasn't sure whether he could catch up with Claudia before tomorrow's match.

"I only hope that I'm thinking too much....."

As Ayato muttered so, he turned his gaze outside of the window.

A red big moon was floating slightly eerily there.

Sneaking into the girl dorm at night was not something he got used to no matter how many times he did it.

Managing somehow to reach Claudia's room while breaking into an unpleasant sweat, he knocked at the window.

The key seemed to be opened, but there was also no reply this time like last time.

As he had no choice but to intrude since he could not cling to the wall forever, a faint light was drifting within the dim room.

Several space windows, which were still kept opened, were fluffily floating.

Looking closely, Claudia was sleeping as she fell prostrate in the desk along the wall. Though her figure was illuminated, with the pale light of the space windows, there was still a slightly fantastic beauty.

Ayato was fascinated for an instant, but he soon noticed that the situation was strange. For someone, who was only just sleeping, her expression was strangely steep.

Strongly furrowing her brows, she occasionally separated her pink lips and a gasp of agony leaked.

(Is she seeing some bad dream.....?)

Anyway, it would be better to wake her up.

The moment when Ayato, who was thinking so, opened his mouth—

“!?”

Two gleaming silver streaks had torn through the darkness and attacked Ayato.

The fact that he had avoided them, one could say, was luck. At least it seemed an attack that he could not avoid as his present self.

It was only because his Ogre Lux had activated, in such a short time before expanding the blade, that even Ayato, in his currently sealed state, could dodge it.

“Claudia.....?”

Still unable to figure out the situation, Ayato stepped back, until reaching the window, and called out. “.....”

However. Claudia, who stood up slowly without replying, her hands loosely hung down both sides, set up the ominous twin swords — Pan-Dora.

Though the light coming in from the window illuminated Claudia, her expression could not be discerned because she was looking downward.

“W-Wait a minute! Claudia!”



At that moment... Claudia moved.

Yet seeming to advance slowly, at first, in the next moment she had already entered Ayato's range. Ayato instantaneously released his power and simultaneously slipped through and dodged the twin swords coming from all directions.

—Or so it seemed.

"Wow!"

The blade, which he thought that he should have dodged, came back by drawing an arc and approached before his eyes. It was an attack which looked as if the twin swords were predicting Ayato's movements.

Although Ayato twisted his body and somehow managed to avoid it, he broke his balance and fell down on his back to the floor. As Claudia sat astride Ayato as is in a fluid motion, she silently raised the twin swords.

"Claudia!"

Ayato called her name the third time, and stretched out his hand almost in desperation.

His fingertips slightly, — just a little, touched Claudia's cheeks.

"!"

Just as Claudia's body shivered with surprise... She suddenly stopped the raised arm.

"Aya...to?"

Claudia was looking down at Ayato for a while with a dumbfounded face, but she suddenly jumped back as she came back to her senses.

"S-Sorry, Ayato! What have I done.....!"

Surprise and regret and above all an intense agitation appeared on Claudia's face. It was his first time seeing Claudia revealing such emotions.

Anyway, as he seemed to be safe for the time being, he heaved a sigh of relief.

On the other hand, Claudia put Pan-Dora on standby and turned her back on Ayato. While heavily breathing for a while as it is, she fixed her breathing.

"—I am really sorry. It seemed that I, of all people, was a little careless."

And when she once more turned around to Ayato, she had already returned to the usual Claudia. She deeply bowed her head apologetically.

"Yes, I was indeed surprised.....what on earth was that?"

Ayato said so while raising his body and smiled wryly.

Honestly, it won't be a lie if one were to say that he felt more dead than alive. Claudia's sword was sharp with an unmatched accuracy, which was in no way inferior compared to Kirin's. Of course, from the perspective of mastership, Kirin's was more complete, but there was no doubt that Claudia possessed an extraordinary accomplishment in skill and technique.

"Well.....from where should I start to explain....."

Claudia was slightly lost in her thought, but she immediately came to her senses with a sense.

"All right, since this is a good opportunity, let's talk about it. It's probably not unrelated to what Ayato wants to know."

".....What do you mean?"

Claudia recommended the sofa to Ayato, who tilted his head in wonder, and she herself sat down in the chair, in which she was sitting until a while ago.

"Before that Ayato, would you please hear one request of mine?"

"One request?"

Claudia's pupils straightly gazed at Ayato.

"Though it's a matter for the future, I would like you to take part in the Gryps next year as a member of my team."

“The Gryps, huh.....”

He was a little surprised at those unexpected words, but his answer was already decided.

“Sure. But only if Julis is with us.”

Ayato had promised Julis to be her strength. And Julis said that she aimed the gram slam. Though it was impossible in the Lindvolus, which was for individual matches, as long as Julis did not say “no”, he also intended to fight in the Gryps with her.

“I expected that answer. But..., honestly, I am envious.”

Claudia revealed a lonely smile.

“But. There's no problem at that point. Since it was also my intention to invite Julis to the team. And I think that she probably won't refuse, either.”

Since Julis' objective was the grand slam, she would naturally desire stronger teammates. If so, it was unlikely for her to turn down Claudia's invitation.

It seemed like Claudia had already set up quite a concrete strategy for the Gryps.

“And... How is the matter of earlier and the Gryps related?”

“It was just to make sure that you will be a teammate before revealing the secret.”

Claudia said so and once again activated Pan-Dora.

There being also the matter of earlier, as expected his body reacted twitchily.

“Fufufu. Do not worry. I will not do what I did earlier anymore By the way Ayato, have you experienced death before?”

“Eh.....?”

Ayato looked back at Claudia with a blank expression.

“E-Errr..... I don’t understand the meaning of the question.”

“Just take it as it means.” Claudia suggested.

“..... No, you would not be in this realm if you were dead, right?”

It’s not like you’re a zombie.

“—I have already died more than 12000 times.” Said Claudia somewhat amused.

“Haa?”

Ayato looked at Claudia with the same blank face as earlier.

He had no idea of what Claudia was taking about.

While seeming to enjoy looking at such Ayato, Claudia raised Pan-Dora and showed him.

“The price that this child, Pan-Dora, requests from its user is “to taste your own death”. Whenever I sleep, I personally experience ‘ the moment of my death to come someday’ in my dream.”

“You personally experienced the moment you die.....?”

Claudia had frankly said so (and shown him) but, wasn’t that obviously a terrible torture?

“The disgusting side of this child is that it doesn’t just show the one same manner of death. It really appreciates how many ways there are of dying for people. From accidental deaths to deaths from illness, freezing to death, starving to death, suicide, and..... death dispensed by another. From all of that the one thing certain was that ‘someday I will probably have a certain death’.”

But, Claudia’s tone, which did not change, was calm and gentle.

“Since I was just about to be killed earlier too, it seems I had unintentionally attacked while I was half asleep. I am sorry.”

Claudia, who said so, once again bowed her head.

“When I wake up, the contents of the dream disappear as if melting. What is left is a fragmentary memory, the pain and fear of being on the verge of the death, and a sense of fatigue. While possessing the extraordinary ability to see the future, the reason why someone able to master this child did not appear is it. It seems that those, who owned this child before me, could hardly bear it for three days.”

She said so while laughing merrily, but the content was extremely appalling.

“.....I’m surprised you’re okay, Claudia.”

“Yeah. Things like today also often occurred, but I surprisingly got used to it.”

“But.....”

As he recalled her painful sleeping face, of earlier, it did not look like anything like that now.

“Fufufu, I am happy. Do you worry about me?”

“Isn’t that obvious?” As he responded with a serious look to Claudia’s teasing tone.

Claudia, after being a little surprised, was slightly bashful.

“..... I think I mentioned it before, but, I also have a wish that I wanted granted. This child is absolutely necessary for that purpose.”

“Then..... What is Claudia’s wish?”

“It is, — still, a secret.”

Claudia slowly shook her head.

Everyone came over to this city with a wish that they want to fulfill.

In order to fulfill that wish, he sought power in order to win and win.

It might matter, to be an issue, of course.

Nonetheless—

“Well, let’s return to the topic. Thus, the greater the Ogre Lux’s ability is to be powerful, the more severe the price on its wielder tends to be. For example. If your Ser-Versta was in the hands of an average Starpulse Generation it would consume such a large quantity of, the wielder’s, prana so as to dry him up in no time. In the first place; It is a fact in itself that a high compatibility rating appearance is rare. In other words you could also say, the high hurdle, to even wield it, is included in the price.”

Claudia cut her words off once reaching that point.

Both her smile and her tone completely resumed their usual tune.

“In fact, since the price varies depends greatly upon individual Ogre Lux, it cannot unconditionally be generalized. I guess that what Ayato wants to know is something, which is related around this topic, right?”

It seemed like she was right on the mark. In that case; It saved the long talk.

Ayato directly cut to the chase.

“—Claudia, what do you know about Gravi-Sheath?”

“About that Ogre Lux, I have no more data than what I have handed to you.”

“Not the data, I want to hear Claudia’s opinion. As a user of an Ogre Lux.”

As Ayato grumbled “even though you know what I mean”. Claudia shook her shoulders with a chuckle.

“Well.....as you know an Ogre Lux possess a will. Do you understand what it means?”

“Eh? Errr..... Hmm.....”

Though Ayato inquired so and was thinking about it, the appropriate answer did not seem to come in mind.

He frankly surrendered by lightly raising both of his hands.

“Fufufu. It is the same as humans. Having a will means having a personality and having a personality means that one can roughly classify them by demarcation.”

“Roughly classify.....?”

“In other words... Good-natured Ogre Lux and ill-natured Ogre Lux.” Claudia stated evenly.

“..... I see.”

Same as humans, huh.

“Well, there are many other ways to say it. For example, you can also say, some Ogre Lux are friendly with humans and some Ogre Lux not so friendly with humans.”

“If I go by that example, which one do you think Ser-Versta is?”

“He — oh, sorry. It might be “her”. Anyway, I think that that kid has a relatively good personality. Well, he seems to have a somewhat rebellious nature though.”

“Then, what about Pan-Dora?”

“Fufufu, this child already has the worst personality. It’s a good match with me though.”

Claudia held her mouth as if it was funny.

It was indeed like Claudia to declare such a thing on her own.

“Then — what about Gravi-Sheath?”

“That kid is.....”

Then Claudia cast down her eyes just a little.

“I do not really want to speak ill of another kid, but he has a somewhat dangerous feeling.”

“.....As expected, Claudia also thinks so?”

Ayato was also of the same opinion.

That Ogre Lux itself was dangerous. Not its ability.

If borrowing Claudia's words, then its personality is.....

"Anyway, since I have yet to see it, this is only my impression, but it looks to me that that kid is quite selfish. That kind of Ogre Lux often interferes with its user."

"Interferes.....?"

"Hmm, it's misleading to say "take over", but it means that the Ogre Lux altered the user's will and personality to its own liking. The longer you use it... The more notable it becomes. And much more importantly... That kid has such influence that it's extent can physically alter its user."

Ayato took a deep breath and looked up at the ceiling.

—In other words, it was probably like that.

"Thank you, Claudia. It was really helpful."

"Do not mention it; are you going back already?"

"Since I have a match tomorrow. I have to rest soon."

"Ara....."

Then, Claudia bewitchingly laughed and openly put on coquettish airs.

“Then, I do not mind even if you sleep here.”

“N-No, I will pass.....!”

Ayato hurriedly stood up and rushed up to the window.

However, when he put a foot on the window frame, he suddenly turned his face.

“Oh, that’s right. About the matter of my nee-san..... The student council president of Le Wolfe seems to know something about it.”

“Dirk Eberwein?”

Claudia asked back as she was surprised.

“It may be, he has happened to meet nee-san before.”

“.....I understand. I will check on this a little as well.”

“Yeah, thank you.”

After saying so, and bowing, Ayato opened the window.

Returning a smile to Claudia’s voice hung from behind while saying “Good luck for tomorrow’s match”. Ayato let his body jump in the darkness of the night.

Chapter 7 – The Bloody Scythe of ^{Gravi-Sheath} Supreme Destruction

Power is necessary, in order to protect something, and a stronger power is necessary in order to obtain something.

Without power, one cannot but lose.

And in order to get back what is lost, a much stronger power is necessary.

That was Irene Urzaiz's creed.

The power struggle of the Integrated Enterprise Foundation was intense; hence its political situation was always unstable. Likewise. There were small countries of Southern Europe which were stuck and sinking little by little into the swamps completely. — Of such countries; A forsaken ruin-like town was Irene's birthplace.

In this era, where the population was concentrated in big cities, and the extreme unipolarization became natural, the humans, who were living in such places were mostly poor. The government system of the Integrated Enterprise Foundation always required a fixed number of economically weak people. Irene's family was no exception either.

In such a family, if a Starpulse Generation child were to be born, there was no way that it would not be pleased. The discrimination towards the Starpulse Generation was so far away from the urban

areas that it became remarkable, but at the same time it was a money tree for the poor. The Starpulse Generation were valued best when being scouted by the academies of Asterisk and playing an active role, by PMC and related defense/security, and by criminal syndicates at worst.

Irene had presumed early the expectation of such parents. Even so, she did not loathe them, but she did not feel a deep affection towards them, either. This was because, for Irene the sole object of concern was her little sister who was also a Starpulse Generation like her.

Unlike her, who was violent and crude, her little sister was gentle, brave and she dearly loved her above all.

For Irene, her little sister was the only person, whom she could turn to with deep affection and at the same time the only person who would return it without compensation.

Then one day, that little sister suffered a serious injury. She was caught up in the collapse of an old building.

The majority of the buildings of the old century, which had been abandoned since the Ember Tears, had already reached the end of their life span, were already known as dangerous. Even so the poor, with no other places to live, could only cling there.

Originally it was such a serious injury that even a Starpulse Generation could lose their life but her little sister had recovered the next day. It was at that time she realized that her little sister was a Regenerative.

Regarding the Starpulse Generation; The potential aptitude test for ability users was obligatory during childhood in any country. However the government functions became somewhat unable to operate with integrity. In the interior of these impoverished countries they were hardly functioning at all, particularly, in non-urban areas. In fact, the non-registered ability users were not few.

And, those guys^[34] always searched for such ability users.

“—You see, Priscilla. These people say that they want you to help them out. Will you go?”

Sure enough, Frauenlob — the scout of Allekant came shortly thereafter.

With a soft, coaxing voice, the mother put her hand on the little sister’s shoulder, and the father signed the contract with a satisfied look. On that contract, there were the characters for Dedicated Scholarship Student of the infamous Allekant. No matter what is done or what happens, the subject cannot voice any complaints, so to speak.

The next day, Irene took her little sister and left the house.

She did not think that she could succeed in escaping, and it was not as if she had somewhere to go, either.

However. She knew that if she did not do so she would have lost her little sister. That, only, she could never accept.

“—Yo, are you Irene Urzaiz?”

In the deserted house where the two girls were hiding, it was three days after leaving the house that that man appeared in front of them.

He was plump, with darkish red hair, and of short stature. His expression was sullenly distorted and his eyes were dazzlingly and strangely shining.

Irene first thought that he was a pursuer from Allekant, but he did not have such an atmosphere about him. More evident was an emblem of crossed twin swords attached to the man’s chest.

“Try to use it.”

As the man said so he threw a Lux’s activation tool towards Irene.

While Irene kept her guard up she touched it. At that moment; A piercing shock ran through her body.

At the same time... She understood.

This is “power”.

The Lux activated and a huge scythe giving off purple phosphorescence appeared. She felt a violent energy rising in her body.

As the man, who saw it, slightly moved his eyebrows, he once again opened his mouth.

“.....Hmm. You passed. All right... Let me hear your wish.”

She neither understood the situation nor knew who the man in front of her was. Even so Irene answered without hesitation. Of course... Irene only had one wish.

And, as long as that wish came true, she was even ready to sell her soul to the devil.

The man hardly changed his expression while hearing her request. After that the man took out his portable terminal and had a conversational exchange with somewhere for a while.

The man then plainly said. “Right now, I have repurchased your little sister. It was a little expensive, but I will have you pay back a part of it by working.”

The man said only that. He turned around, with his back showing, and started to walk off.

But... He suddenly stopped on the way, turned his small head, and gazed at Irene and Priscilla.

“Don’t just forget this. It’s not Le Wolfe that has saved you. But me. Therefore, it’s not Le Wolfe that will use you, but me. Okay?”

Now that she thought about it, only the point of being sent from Allekant to Le Wolfe changed, it probably didn’t necessarily mean that something was resolved.

Even so, in order to take back Priscilla from Dirk, she was given necessary time, chance and above all “power”.

And, it was enough for her.

“.....Onee-chan? It’s about time.”

As she opened her eyes to that voice, Priscilla was looking into her face with an anxious expression.

—In a waiting room of Sirius Dome. By checking the time, she thought that it would be indeed bad if they did not soon go to the stage.

“All right, then, let’s settle the task.”

As Irene said so and stood up from the sofa, she gently stroked Priscilla’s head.

“Don’t worry. Everything will be all right as usual.”

“Yeah.....”

It was Irene, who always received orders from Dirk. Priscilla did not know anything and did not ask anything. However, she would only give her blood to Irene when needed.

Irene thought that it was better like that.

Whether it be standing place on the field of battle or dirtying her hands... She herself was enough. Such a thing did not suit Priscilla.

She already did so up to now and it would never change even in the future.

“Well, that said, those two indeed aren’t your average opponents. It’ll be hard if I don’t go all out from the start.”

Irene said and activated Gravi-Sheath^[35].

Priscilla, who saw it, revealed the nape of her neck as she understood.

A desire hard to resist, swelled up in Irene’s heart, and she silently thrust her fangs into that white neck’s nape.

“Ah.....” A thin voice leaked from Priscilla’s mouth.

Irene then sensed the taste of lukewarm iron coarsing down through her throat.

—Since when? Did she come to think that this taste was sweet... Irene wondered.

In response; Gravi-Sheath trembled with joy.

She remained in that state probably for a good minute.

As Irene released her mouth she lovingly caressed the deep scar
... Though it was small.

However. It then disappeared from view.

“I’m sorry for doing this as always.”

As Irene said so, Priscilla shook her head (in denial).

“No, this much is not a big deal. But—”

Irene tightly embraced Priscilla, who looked downward.

Priscilla muttered in Irene’s arms in a small voice.

“I’m sorry, Onee-chan.”

“Idiot. Why do you apologize?”

Once she completed the one task, with it she would be able to haul in Priscilla with her own hands.

Dirk was not a trustworthy man, but he never broke his promises.

So for now. She had no choice... But to fight.

“Well, it’s about time.”

To Julis’ voice, Ayato suddenly raised his face.

“Ah, yeah. You’re right.”

“.....What’s wrong? It’s not good to be lost in thought just before a match.”

Julis put a hand on her waist and pouted.

Ayato smiled wryly and lightly waved his hands.

“No, it’s nothing. Let’s go.”

“Hmm, then it’s fine.” Julis’ face showed that she was not yet convinced.

She took a glance at the watch and slightly exhaled.

Like that... The two people came out of the waiting room.

“Ayato”

Julis, who went ahead making footsteps with a clacking sound, said without looking back.

“Hmm?”

“I must win. No matter who the opponent is, I don’t intend to concede his wish. That’s why I’m here now.”

“.....Yeah.” Ayato, still, thinking.

“But — I’m also not going to dwell on how to win.”

The long corridor leading to the stage seemed to be short.

Julis’ voice slightly echoed and flowed behind.

“If we can win in the way you wish, then let’s just do so. We’re partners after all. Let’s cooperate and fight hand-in-hand. It’s something normal... Right?”

“Julis.....”

Ayato stopped his footsteps and looked at Julis.

He bowed his head to Julis, who similarly stopped several steps ahead.

“—Thank you.”

“Idiot. It’s not something to be thankful for.”

The cheeks of Julis, who slightly looked back just a little, were slightly dyed red as she felt embarrassed.

“So, what do you intend to do?”

“Uh huh. There’s something I want to try. I don’t know whether or not we can do it. But.....”

As Ayato explained his intention, Julis opened her eyes wide as she was surprised.

“Yeah..... Certainly, it’s not as if there has been no precedent, but... The opponent is that Gravi-Sheath you know?”

“I know that it’s difficult. But—”

To Ayato, who vigorously said, Julis responded with a wry smile.

“Haa..... I understand. Let’s try it. But... There will probably be only one chance. If we fail, you will just have to give up on it.”

“Then it won’t be helped.”

“It’s fine if you understand. Okay — Then... Let’s go.”

And they gently held out their fists.

Ayato nodded and they bumped their fists against each other.

『Well then, the heated matches will continue at each venue for the fourth round! The finalists gracing Sirius Dome today are the Amagiri/Riessfeld pair of Seidoukan Academy and the Urzaiz sisters of Le Wolfe Black Institute! Which tag team will advance to the best 16!』

『"This is also a match to look forward to. Since either of them has won through the qualifier almost without letting their opponents have even the slightest chance. I think that this will become a watershed event."

『"Well then. Here I would like Tram-san to give her conjecture about the outcome of this match. Since Gravi-Sheath, which is used by player Irene, has heavy fuel (prana) consumption^[36], will Seidoukan be advantageous if it's a drawn-out battle after all?"』

『"Hmm well. I think that we can't unconditionally say that. Since player Irene has, so to speak, the supply line called player Priscilla after all. Besides, in terms of comparison of the ability in itself....."

"Hmph, as usual they speak as if it was that simple."

Julis' reaction to such live commentaries was to furrow her eyebrows and grumble.

Since, Ayato had a limit, it was rather their side which could not draw out the battle.

From this point onward, aside from the first adjustment day of just entering, there was no resting day up until the finals.

If he released the seal for a long period of time, it was clear that the matches on and after next day would be difficult.

—However.

“Ayato, don’t overdo it....., though it’s probably useless to say it.”

“After all... It’s an opponent that we can't defeat without overdoing it.”

Julis activated Aspera Spina and nodded.

“I agree. Let’s go all out from the start.”

Ayato returned a nod, fixed his breathing and raised his prana.

Magic circles appeared around Ayato and the mana shone and burst. Power swelled up within his body and pain ran through all directions.

“—Secret sword bound by the prison of stars, release your might!”

The binding chains of imprisonment, which admonished all creations, were smashed up and power overflowed.

『“There it appeared! Player Amagiri’s performance... With which we are already familiar!”

『“It’s flashy whenever I see it.”

The gallery seethed all at once, and cheers flew about wildly.

“I see that you’re highly motivated, Amagiri.”

Irene, who placed Gravi-Sheath on her shoulder, lightly laughed while glaring at the active Ayato.

Irene stepped forward alone, leaving Priscilla behind.

“Well then. I’ll also go all out……!”

Gravi-Sheath emitted a purple light and mana weirdly wriggled

The tension stretched—

“Phoenix fourth round 11th match, battle start!”

The mechanical voice announced the start of the battle.

“Bloom proudly — Flaming ^{Livingstone Daisy} Crimson Decapitator!”

Julis immediately activated her ability, and flame blew up from her surroundings.

The flame wound a swirl, turned into crimson chakrams ^[37], and attacked Irene from all directions.

“Hahaha! What pretense!”

Irene easily cut down the chakrams, which amounted to about ten, with Gravi-Sheath.

But, at that opportunity (chance), Ayato shortened the distance at a stretch.

He was just barely running between the chakrams while holding Ser-Versta, and slashed at her from a low position.

“Oops!”

Irene stopped the blow with Gravi-Sheath and the two weapons’ edges collided and sparks fell as if dancing.

Although Ser-Versta was an Ogre Lux, which cut through everything it touched, the opponent had an Ogre Lux of the same level. It seemed that things would not go so well. He knew that by engaging in close range combat, he would gradually overcome his opponent’s blade, but with that alone, he could not say that he had a particular advantage.

Since Ayato had expected this, he immediately changed his tactic, and slashed at her torso while rotating it as he rolled up his body.

Irene repelled it with Gravi-Sheath and like that she slashed down with an overhead chop but Ayato’s following backslash was one step faster than it. So he dodged the diagonal cut to his shoulder, as he promptly shifted his body, and in a flash Ayato followed up with a thrust towards her.

Irene turned Gravi-Sheath around and defended against it using the blade as a shield. Sparks danced once again, but Ayato twisted his wrist after pulling once the point of his sword, and repelled Gravi-Sheath.

“Wha-!?”

He sliced down with Ser-Versta aiming at her chest, — her school badge, which became wide open.

Irene leaped back and dodged it by a hairsbreadth, but her trademark muffler was torn and burnt up.

“Tch! To think I was pressed so far.....! As expected I’m at disadvantage when crossing blades, huh!”

Furthermore, the fiery chakrams sprung at Irene one after another as if they had been waiting for the timing when she dodged.

“—^{Diez Fanega}Tenfold Destroyer!”

However, as Irene made one swing of Gravi-Sheath, black gravity balls appeared around her body, clashed with the chakrams and vanished into each other.

『“—Th-This is an amazing offense and defense from the very beginning! The combination of the players Amagiri and Riessfeld was impressive, but player Urzaiz, who has outdone herself, is even more amazing!”

『“To dive into those three-dimensional mobile flames is amazing. Player Riessfeld originally possessed splendid control but player Amagiri could not readily do it if he did not trust his tag partner very much.”

Ayato and Irene re-measured the distance between each other, and Julis kept her original distance and focused on her next skill.

“Hmm, it’s not so bad for an improvised tag formed for one or two months.” Irene said so while catching her breath.

Julis responded to it while setting up Aspera Spina.

“You too. You really dodge it well even when alone.”

“Hahaha! I’m not alone. There are also two of us here.”

A ferocious light glowed in Irene’s pupils and sharp fangs peeped out from her mouth as she broadly laughed.

“This is the power of both Priscilla and I!”

Gravi-Sheath shook with a clattering sound, and a purple light streamed down the ground.

It looked as if it was laughing—

“Dodge it, Ayato!”

Ayato was already moving before Julis cried.

The air of the surroundings, where Ayato was until a while ago, violently shook.

Probably, the gravity around there was manipulated.

“Ho~u, you indeed have good reaction.”

“I already saw it several times after all.”

Ayato re-set Ser-Versta while carefully dropping his waist.

Gravi-Sheath gravity manipulation was a range specified type ability. Therefore, no matter what, a moment of time lag was required before it's activation. Average students could probably not cope with it but the current Ayato was somehow able to evade it.

“But, did you think that you can conquer (capture) this Gravi-Sheath with that level?”

Within Irene’s hand, Gravi-Sheath laughed once again.

“—!”

The purple light ran on the ground, but this time the range was much wider than earlier.

Ayato, who leaped greatly to one side, was not able to evade it, was suddenly endowed with a heavy pressure.

“Eh.....?”

But, on the contrary, instead of being crushed, Ayato's body started floating softly.

“It’s toilsome to make the gravity really strong but just weakening it somewhat is not really so hard. So... I can specify a wide range like this.”

Ayato was floating at a height of about two meters.

I did not matter if he was of the Starpulse Generation he still couldn't do anything. Even though he tried to move his limbs he had no purchase^[38] to apply his power. His limbs, flapping, cut the sky in vain and his body just turned around.

“Ayato!”

“Oops, you, just stay quiet here!”

Gravi-Sheath was swung towards Julis, who tried to hurriedly rush over, and a heavy pressure weighed on her body.

“Guh.....!”

Although Julis fell down as she rolled, and was going to stand up, it seemed that she could not even move a knee.

It was a degree of activation range that was not impossible for Julis with her reflexes to dodge, but seemingly, her move towards Ayato's side was completely read.

“Well then, my control is not as good as the ^{Gruene Rose}Petalblaze Witch's, but in a case of an immobile target, then it's another issue. —
^{Uno Fanega}Onefold Destroyer!”

A gravity ball appeared before Irene's eyes, and exactly aimed at Ayato.

But, Irene suddenly fell to her knees.

“Tch, as expected, it’s difficult to maintain three different abilities.....! Even though I refilled that much, it’s already reached the bottom huh.....!”

Irene was painfully distorting her face.

Nevertheless, the ability was still holding out.

“Well, it’s fine....., with this, it’s over, Amagiri!”

The gravity balls were shot towards Ayato and the very moment they were going to directly hit him—

“Bloom proudly — Six-Petal ^{Amaryllis} Burst Firebloom.....!”

The fireballs shot by Julis, who was still lying on the ground, directly hit in front of the gravity balls.

“Guh!” Ayato grumbled as he tumbled on the ground.

“What!?” Irene was suprised.

Ayato’s body was blown off by the small explosion.

Still quite quickly he rebuilt his stance and frowned towards Julis.

“..... I’m thankful that you’ve saved me, but wasn’t there a more gentle way to do it?”

“It was still better than losing like that, right? Besides I held down the power to the minimum possible. So this level of power wouldn't have caused damage on someone like you with that much prana.”

As Gravi-Sheath's attack was dispelled, Julis, who was rushing over, returned a joke to Ayato.

On the other hand, though Irene still kept her eyes on Ayato, she was slowly retreating little by little. She was probably heading towards Priscilla in order to refill blood.

“Julis!”

“I know! Bloom proudly — White Firebloom of the Sharp Spear^{Longiflorum}!”

As Julis waved her thin sword, the spears of flames manifested along its trajectory.

It was the best chance now that Irene could not use Gravi-Sheath's ability. There was no way that they would be silent and just watch.

Ayato also ran off a moment later behind the spears of flames that were shot and were tearing through the air.

—However.

“—Heavy^{Orreaga Pesado} Reed Prison”

The spears of flames were stopped by a purple wall — no, it was rather more like jail grate — which suddenly appeared to grow up from the ground.

Ayato hurriedly braked just in front of it.

It seemed that thin purple rods, which were vertically stretched gravity balls, were linked in a grid pattern.

“Setting type Defense ability.....!”

Though Julis bit her lips in frustration. In the meantime Irene arrived at Priscilla’s side.

“Hahaha. At the time this insolent person went and sniped not at me but Priscilla, I had prepared an ace up my sleeve as a precaution. It can’t be easily destroyed.”

Irene lightly laughed on the other side of the wall, and thrust her fangs at Priscilla’s neck as she showed off.

Because Ayato wielded Ser-Versta he could still break through the wall. He would, however, no longer make it in time.

“.....with this, I’m fully restored.” Irene boasted.

As Ayato, who sighed, checked the time, two minutes had soon passed since the battle started.

Ideally speaking, they wanted to bring down the opponent in one minute, but.....

“Ayato!”

Julis called Ayato with a sharp voice.

“What’s the matter?” As Julis came over to his side.

“— The preparations are complete. If you want to try, that, do it quickly.”

As Ayato turned back, Julis briefly said in low voice while whispering into his ear.

“.....Roger.”

While hearing that Ayato returned a nod and grasped Ser-Versta tightly.

The following move was a special of Julis. Its success or failure would probably influence the outcome of the battle.

If so, taking the time into consideration, there were not many chances left for Ayato.

[—If we can win in the way you desire, then let’s do so.]

He recalled Julis’ words right before the battle.

It seemed that he had no choice but to try to aim for it before Julis’ bold move activated.

“.....Yo, I kept you waiting. Well then, shall we go for the second round?”

As the wall soon disappeared as if melting, Irene stepped forward while wiping her lips.

Behind her, Priscilla lied down completely exhausted, and she was roughly breathing.

Ayato, who saw it, sadly knitted his brows.

“Do you think that that way of doing things is really correct?”

“.....Shut up, Amagiri. You don’t have to explain such a thing at this late hour.”

“If that’s the case—”

“You shut up I said!”

A purple shine ran on the ground at the same time Irene raised Gravi-Sheath.

Ayato, Irritated, took a great leap back while escaping the ability's activation range. The range was also much wider than before but Ayato had grown accustomed to it and reacted early.

“So restless.....!”

As expected, it seemed that, she would not listen if not by force.

Ayato resolved himself and set up Ser-Versta to the side.

“Bloom proudly — Dancing ^{Primrose}nine-spirering-flower!”

Julis' support entered there.

"You're annoying! Hundred fold ^{Cien Guesta} Funeral Procession!"

Then, as Irene brandished Gravi-Sheath, a purple wave motion spread out like an aurora, and the primroses of flame, that fluttered about most lovingly, were all crushed and vanished in the air.

Even as that occurred Ayato turned around and approached from the right side toward the slight newly created opening and jumped straight into Irene's bosom.

"Amagiri Bright Dragon Style First Sword Fighting Skill — < Twin Water Dragons>!"

Returning his arm, from mowing down the initial blow, he stepped further in and matched it with a rising slash from underneath.

"Tch!"

A powerful impact sounded and an afterglow burst forth.

Irene somehow defended against it with Gravi-Sheath, but her stance was entirely destroyed. Ayato did not miss the chance and swung Ser-Versta downward, with all his might, aiming at Gravi-Sheath.

"Wha-!?"

Ser-Versta's maneuverability was not so effective, since it was somewhat large, but it was also the same for Gravi-Sheath. Although the blow was driven into the engine chamber, where the Ulm mana dite was embedded, it was blocked by a purple light and its power had been considerably spoiled. It was a clear response at defense.

Gravi-Sheath emitted a shrill sound like a scream and, in place of where Ayato was trying to inflict another blow, he was suddenly sent flying by an invisible power.

"Urgh!"

It was probably Gravi-Sheath's ability. Ayato immediately returned to his stance and raised his face, but right in of his line of sight, Irene was glaring at Ayato with anger filling her eyes.

".....I see. I didn't think that you would aim at Gravi-Sheath...
...!"

That's right. The very aim of Ayato was the destruction of Gravi-Sheath.

Originally, destroying an Ogre Lux was a next-to impossible undertaking but, if the attacker wielded an Ogre Lux of the same level, it was not impossible.

If he had succeeded in doing so, the battle would have been almost settled, but now that his aim was found out, there would probably not be a second chance.

“It was close, but it’s time-out, Ayato.”

Julis called out there with a serious expression.

“.....I know.”

It was the best hand that the current Ayato could deal, but, there was no help for it since it failed.

Ayato nodded and renewed his feelings.

“Seriously, you’ve shown me various things through all possible means. Well, I better return the favor.....!”

Gravi-Sheath, in Irene’s hand, strengthened the purple light as if it was also angry.

“—Ten thousand folds ^{Diez Mil Fanega} Destroyer!”

As Irene wielded Gravi-Sheath, gravity balls appeared in the air. They were as big as a fist - smaller than all of them up until now.

However — their number was astounding.

“Oi oi.....”

Julis muttered with a cramped face.

The gravity balls were rapidly increasing their numbers before their eyes; and it wasn't on the order of ten or twenty. At least, there was no doubt, it was exceeding one hundred.

“I said it before, but I’m not that good at control. But well, with this, it doesn’t matter.....!”

“Julis! I will be all right, so focus on your own defense. And then.....”

“Ah, I know!”

While hearing Julis’ reply, Ayato set up Ser-Versta before him.

“Be crushed and disappear!” Irene announced.

At the same time that Irene swung Gravi-Sheath downward the multiple gravity balls aimed at Ayato and attacked.

There was only about ten percent of the number, which headed towards Julis.

However that could be expected if thinking about Irene’s aim. Anyway, with only that many, Julis should be able to protect herself.

Ayato deeply inhaled while simultaneously focusing his mind. He made an image of a small circle around him and strained to put his consciousness into it.

—This circle was Ayato’s absolute defense zone.

“Amagiri Bright Dragon Style Intermediate Technique — < Arrow Clearing Crow>.”

The gravity balls that fiercely came to attack him were all bisected the instant they penetrated that zone.

With a flash-like slash, Ayato continued to repulse the swarm of gravity balls, which came to attack in succession from all directions, without letting even one pass. The gallery, let alone Ayato's sword flash, was probably not even seeing his arm which was swinging that sword.

"Oi oi, seriously....."

Seeing the number of gravity balls decreasing before her eyes, Irene's expression was warped in shock.

Ayato confirmed that the number already decreased to less than half and this time he launched himself upon them. He slowly worked his way through the gravity balls and then jumped to within Irene's reach at a stretch.

"Tch!"

Irene immediately coped with it as she set up Gravi-Sheath and returned Ayato's attack.

Gravi-Sheath and Ser-Versta clashed fiercely as sparks danced violently.

Ayato and Irene continued to lock blades at close range while they steadily gain and lose ground to one another, but before long Irene greatly leaped back at Ayato's sword pressure, as if having been sent flying.

“Julis!”

Ayato shouted to Julis who, had already dodged all the gravity balls, responded.

“Leave it to me!”

A magic circle appeared where Irene was about to land.

It was Julis’ setting type ability.

“Come out — Glorious Rending ^{Gloriosa} Flame Claw Flower!”

A huge flame claw blew up from the ground moving to crush Irene.

“Hahaha! Your lure was obvious!”

In fact. Irene seemed to have anticipated it from the beginning.

She thrust Gravi-Sheath in the ground, and easily shattered the magic circle, which was brightly shining. The flame claw also shook like a hazy heat wave, and vanished.

It was a clear failure.

—But, it was fine.

“Oh, it’s fine even if it was obvious, — that’s just a simple decoy.”

“What did you say.....!?”

The Color of surprise floated on Irene’s face as a magic circle again appeared at her feet.

No. Saying 'at' her feet would not be exact.

Its size was ten times more than that of earlier with its diameter slightly exceeding twenty meters.

“It's the skill of the highest thermodynamic power, among my setting type abilities, you should taste it fully!”

Julis had obviously already set up Aspera Spina. At the same time that she swung it downward the magic circle shone red. One could clearly see a huge amount of mana flowing into it.

“Damn it!” Irene started running so as to escape.

But there was no way that she could make it in time.

“Come out — Great Sparkling ^{Rafflesia} Bomb Ring Flower!”

At that moment a truly magnificent flame flower of extraordinary size swelled up and with a large storm-like blast, complete with an earsplitting roaring sound, enveloping the entire stage, violently blew out with scorching heat reaching all the way over to Ayato who had already taken enough distance. Even the remaining gravity balls in the air completely vanished by the blast-effect.

It was a tremendous power far beyond imagination.

In fact, since this skill consumed a great amount of prana, it apparently took a lot of time and effort to prepare it.

Julis was secretly advancing the preparations while supporting Ayato, who was fighting at the vanguard.

“O-Onee-chan!”

Priscilla with a pale face tried to approach but the fumes and flames from the explosions had not yet cleared up. The situation inside could not be observed.

Since a Starpulse Generation instinctively invested all his prana in defense when he faced a life crisis; unless in extreme circumstances, she should not be in a life-threatening situation, but with this, even Irene and Gravi-Sheath would not probably get away unscathed.

—However.

“! Impossible……!”

In the center of the crater caused by the explosion, looking downward, was the figure of Irene who was loosely standing while holding Gravi-Sheath in her hand.

Her clothes were burnt everywhere, but injuries that could be called injuries were nowhere to be found.

And a huge gravity ball was floating around Irene so as to protect her.

“Don’t tell me she held down the blast with Gravi-Sheath’s ability.....? No, but, it shouldn’t have such an ability.....”

Julis muttered with an amazed face.

Ayato was also thinking the same thing. From the power that Irene used so far, it was very unlikely for her to hold back an attack of that power. Even if by any chance she managed to do so, then she would certainly lose her life as the price^[39].

[If so, was she not fighting seriously until now.....? No, that can’t be]

“Thanks God! Onee-chan!”

Priscilla ran up to her while letting herself brighten with relief but Irene, still looking downward, did not move.

(—!)

At that moment. An ominous feeling crossed Ayato’s mind.

At the same time, in Ayato’s hands, Ser-Versta wriggled as if shivering.

“Onee... chan.....?”

As Priscilla felt a discomfort, she stopped several steps in a place slightly away from Irene.

She tightly grasped both her hands in front of her chest, and stared at Irene with an anxious expression.

Then, for the first time, Irene moved.

With an unsteadily disorienting pace... She slowly headed towards Priscilla.

Priscilla slightly stepped back..... Tripped and then fell down.

“It’s bad!”

“Hey, Ayato!”

The moment when Ayato was about to suddenly start running – a tremendous pressure attacked both of them.

“Urgh.....!”

“Wh-What, is it.....!”

Both Ayato and Julis were pressed against the ground with no way to perform a technique. The ground started to crack by the pressure; pain and feeling weight oppressive enough to make them lose consciousness, if they relaxed their attention even a little, assaulted their whole body.

Gravi-Sheath gravity manipulation — that, they knew. But, its range and power could not be compared to those until now. Almost the whole stage was covered with the purple glow, let alone standing, they were not even able to speak. As if a mountain was riding on top of their body.

As they somehow managed to move their heads and turned their line of sight toward Irene and Priscilla; Priscilla was, held in Irene's left hand, completely exhausted. And Irene's fangs were sticking out and into her neck.

“Argh..... I don't know what on earth is happening.....!”

Julis groaned in a voice, which was squeezed out.

“Probably..... That's not Irene. It's Gravi-Sheath.....!” Ayato stated.

“What... Did you say.....?”

In contrast to Julis, who was surprised, for some reason Ayato had the firm belief, that his intuition was correct.

Gravi-Sheath had taken over Irene's body. Its scythe, which emitted the sinister purple glow, as usual looked as if it was laughing while it shook with a clattering sound.

“Anyway, at this rate, Priscilla will be in danger.....”

Priscilla was, again, having her blood sucked by Irene since just a little bit ago. However much she was a Regenerative, if she

continued to pay the price for this much ability drain, Priscilla's life would be in danger for sure.

As Ayato mustered his strength and somehow managed to raise his body, he began to walk little by little towards Irene..... and Gravi-Sheath.

His body seemed to be heavily sheared and a violent pain was running about his whole body. This was not only Gravi-Sheath's ability, but it was probably also because the limit of his seal release had already passed.

Probably he could only hold on for only one more short minute. If the seal was returned, during this situation, it would be the end.

However, however much he was encouraged or scolded, his feet were so heavy and his pace progressed slowly. Irene was only a dozen meters of distance away, but it felt as if it were dozens of times that.

Even so. He could not give up here.

Originally; In the Festa there was the rule which said that the loss of consciousness was considered a defeat. Since the judgment is performed by the school badge measuring vital reactions, the sentence of defeat being not being made yet, meant that Irene's consciousness might, if only slightly, still remain.

If that was so, he could only, gamble on it.

Struggling, he reached a place only ten meters off, Ayato strained his voice.

“Irene.....!”

While still moving ahead slowly. There was no reaction from Irene.

Gravi-Sheath, in her hand, only seemed to laugh.

Five meters remaining.

A little more and she would be within Ayato’s reach.

“Come to your senses, Irene! You must not mix important things with power!”

Several more steps.

Ayato shouted.

“Irene! If it’s something really important... You must grab it with both your hands! Think about which way you desire now!”

For an instant.

Just for an instant... Light returned to Irene’s eyes.

“Ah.....”

The abnormal gravity vanished, the purple light weakened, and silence fell as if the world completely changed.

—However.

“Uoooooooooooooh!”

The next moment a pressure, stronger than that of a little while ago, along with Irene’s scream, squashed Ayato once again.

Irene, completely exhausted, drooped just like that as vitality instantly vanished from her body. Even so. Her right hand did not let Gravi-Sheath go.

—No, it did not part. Irene was no longer the user of Gravi-Sheath but only the part which supplied fuel (prana) to it. And probably, if it ended, she would be discarded.

Thrusting its tip on the ground, Gravi-Sheath, which emitted the sinister purple glow, shrilly laughed.

Before the eyes of those who reached out to a ray of hope. It enjoyed reaping that hope... In order to drive them to despair remembering that loud malicious laughter.

Unable to move a single finger under the pressure... Ayato was feeling a strong bubbling anger welling up.

—A pure anger towards that which trampled down dignity.

He gritted his teeth and strongly grasped Ser-Versta, and as if responding to it, Ser-Versta strongly shook. Ser-Versta was connected to something deep within him — just for a moment.

[This is.....]

Although it could not be expressed with words, at that moment, Ayato certainly felt Ser-Versta's will.

What was down there was....., if one were to forcibly look for a word close to human emotions, it would be "discomfort". Something like a strong discomfort towards Gravi-Sheath.

And then a will. Which sought something from Ayato..... Or rather test him.

As if it said "try it if you can do it"—

"Didn't I tell you before that I hate being tested.....?"

Ayato stood with all the power he could muster while saying so

Amidst a world colored over with purple shine, Ser-Versta's Ulm mana dite emitted a red light. It gradually increased its strength, while at the same time, gradually eroding the purple light as if burning a paper.

Ser-Versta was a poor-defense demon sword that burned away all of creation.

If it was the case, then.

“Haaaaah!”

Using all of his strength, Ayato mowed down the empty space with Ser-Versta.

—At that moment, the purple shine, which completely covered the world, was bisected.

Gravi-Sheath’s laughter froze.

The abnormal gravity vanished once again. —However... From the source this time.

It was probably for just an instant of time that Gravi-Sheath’s power was cut off.

That precise moment was enough for Ayato.



As Ayato instantly shortened the distance, he slashed at Gravi-Sheath from a low position and splashed it away from Irene's right hand.

And as he scowled at Gravi-Sheath, which fluttered in midair while rotating, raining down in accordance to gravity, Ayato struck it down as it passed by and it deeply pierced the ground when it stopped.

As his wrist turned. "Amagiri Bright Dragon Style Sword Intermediate Technique — <Serene Inner Self>"

One beat, in a dissonance like rubbing glass, resounded throughout the stage.

There was no telling how many people there were who realized it was the death agony of an Ogre Lux.

In any case, at the same time as the disturbance broke off, countless cracks appeared in Gravi-Sheath's appearance. It shattered to pieces.

At the same time the mechanical voice declared the conclusion.

"Irene Urzaiz and Urzaiz Priscilla, loss of consciousness."

"Winner, Amagiri Ayato & Julis-Alexia Van Riessfeld!"

While the best cheers of the tournament were shaking the stage, Ayato fell down where he stood, lying down with arms and legs spread out, and deeply exhaled.

Epilogue

As Priscilla slowly opened her eyelids, the first thing that came into her sight was the face of the most important person to her.

Seeing her older sister, Irene, (Onee-chan) who floated above with a gentle wry smile without saying anything, at the same time she felt relieved, an inappropriate question suddenly crossed her mind.

She wondered, since recently it was not very often, how long ago she had seen her older sister smiling from the bottom of her heart. Certainly, her older sister had always been hot-tempered and coarse, but she was above all someone who laughed more often than many.

“.....What’s wrong? Do you hurt anywhere?”

To her big sister, who looked into her face as she was worried, Priscilla slightly shook her head.

When looking around, she was apparently in a hospital room. A room clean and cozy, with white walls and ceiling, Priscilla was resting in a bed.

It was the health ward of Le Wolfe. If not... This was probably a medical center.

She traced her memory, to know why she would be in a place like this, and immediately remembered.

[That's right. In the middle of the battle, Onee-chan's behavior became strange.....]

She remembered up until there, but after that, it became vague in any way.

"Err, why am I....."

"You ran out of prana. You probably don't remember, but it seemed that I sucked too much of your blood."

As her sister said so, she quickly bowed her head, with a face likely to burst into tears.

"I'm sorry.....!"

"No."

Priscilla shook her head with a light smile.

Though vaguely, there was, at least, a conviction there. That thing during the end of the match, was not her sister.

That was surely—

"So, how did the match turn out?" Priscilla asked.

"We lost." Irene frankly said.

Although she somehow already knew, but asked just in case.

"I see....."

Since her big sister probably did not come out with high hopes to begin with, it was fine.

“Then — what about Gravi-Sheath?” wondered Priscilla.

Then, her big sister greatly exhaled with a flat face.

“It was broken.”

“Eh.....?”

“That bastard Amagiri smashed it to pieces.”

She constantly shrugged her shoulders while sighing.

Priscilla was surprised for a moment — and then slightly burst into laughter.

“Ahahaha, I see..... Amagiri-san did that. Huh.”

Priscilla recalled the face of the good-natured boy.

In that case, then I should think about something to thank him again. I will make a more luxurious dinner this time, she thought.

“Ah, but then, were you scolded by the president.....?”

Gravi-Sheath was not her sister’s personal possession. She borrowed it from Le Wolfe — thus from the Integrated Enterprise Foundation.

“No, surprisingly, there was no blame.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah. Well. Since I was not able to carry out his order, the debt won’t decrease.” Irene admitted.

Her sister said so and dejectedly dropped her shoulders.

“All that wasted labor I’ve done.....Haa.”

It seemed that her big sister’s expression was rather lucid even though she said so.

“Well, I might also have been a little impatient, there's nothing that can be done about it.”

Looking at her sister, who was scratching her head, Priscilla also raised her face.

“.....You see, Onee-chan.”

“Hmmm?”

“I had thought that what Onee-chan wants to do is the most important thing. Of course, it went without saying that I would stop you, if you behaved violently and tried to do bad things, but even so, it’s because Onee-chan had always cherished me the most.”

That’s right. Priscilla had thought so all the time.

That was why, so as not to be a burden for her big sister, she did the best she could in the scope of what she could do. If it was the best thing for her sister and for herself.

It was probably the same for her big sister. Since her big sister was really a gentle person, she had probably been thinking that; It would be better if she fought alone and it would be better if she shouldered everything.

But, certainly, just that wasn't enough anymore. At least, they continued to live in this city.

Just being protected was not good, and just protecting was not good, either.

If someone extends their hand to you, you should also extend your hand to them in turn. If they pull you up you should also stand up by yourself. If they embrace you. You must also return the embrace; Otherwise it wasn't on equal footing.

"However — I want to become strong. If Onee-chan fights, I want to fight together with you. I don't want to be always protected; I want to stand next to Onee-chan."

"Priscilla....."

"It's no use even if you try to stop me. And someday.....I will absolutely become stronger than Onee-chan."

Irene looked at Priscilla with an astonished face, but she soon burst into laughter.

In a happily and heartily refreshing state.

“Hahaha, I see — I’m looking forward to it.”

It was this smiling-like Irene that Priscilla was seeing for the first time in a long time

In the space window of the student council room, the conclusion scene of today’s match was reflected just now. It was a live video, but something recorded.

Ayato’s Ser-Versta splendidly crushed Irene’s Gravi-Sheath, and Ayato’s and Julis’ victory was declared.

“Hmm.....”

Dirk was looking at it as he let a candid feeling of disgust blur on his face as usual.

“—Well, it turned out like this.”

He removed his gaze from the screen while murmuring to himself.

The original plan of crushing Amagiri Ayato could not be achieved, but there were also many gains. So he should settle with it.

Having lost Gravi-Sheath was slightly unexpected, but since the Ulm mana dite core was collected, there was no particular problem. Rather, with the matter of this time, that should also become a little quiet.

Irene and Priscilla were still of use to him. More importantly, it was an unexpected result that, they were able to make a connection with Amagiri Ayato. With this... The measures which he could adopt increased remarkably.

And above all — there was this.

Dirk returned once again his gaze to the screen, Ayato, who was lying on his back there, was in agony with a painful expression.

『"Uh-oh, what on earth is this? Player Amagiri can't get up! Tram-san, does this mean, after all, that he suffered considerable damage?"

『"Hmm, well.....no, but this mana is clearly....."

Then, many magic circles shining around Ayato appeared, binding chains, which emerged from there, climbed all over his body.

And the moment that a big light shone, all of them vanished.

What was left was only Ayato completely exhausted.

『"Eh? Huh.....?"

『".....Player Amagiri's prana, which was intense, has dropped extremely. Maybe his usual display is not a performance at all—"

Dirk turned off the space screen there, and snorted.

He had heard the rumors, and it was uncertain, but this was now clear.

—Amagiri Ayato could maintain that power only for a certain period of time.

Probably the guys of other academies also arrived at the same conclusion.

That said, there might be still doubt about it; but Dirk was sure of it.

After all... He had also seen that power, which was binding Ayato, before.

In any case, if this became public, it would become extremely difficult for Ayato and Julis to win and advance to the next round after this, and at this rate, it was certain that they would come to a deadlock in the near future.

"Was it rash for me to have made the "cats" get ready?"

His next trick had not yet completely moved over, so he might invest them in another mission now.

However, Dirk immediately shook his head and denied his own words.

“—No, wrong. It’s the younger brother of that woman. No one knows what might happen.”

In fact this time, Ayato, despite the short time, succeeded in pulling out a portion of Ser-Versta’s power. Though whether he would be able to master it was questionable, it would be better to be more safe than sorry^[40].

As Dirk thuddingly put his short feet on the brand new office desk, he deeply exhaled.

According to Dirk’s scheming... It was probably going to be close to the spider web.

The countless plans spread around at all places, even if one of them was discontinued, it would squeeze some profit somewhere different.

That was why Dirk had never happened to lose.

Even now and probably in the future.

“If there is a cause for concern, it would be the damn kids of World Dragon, but how far will they take out the dabble..... Besides. I’ll have to keep tabs on the lassie of Allekant.....”

While grumblingly muttering, the <Tyrant> immersed himself in complex thinking.

“A-Are you all right, Ayato-senpai?”

Kirin, who jumped in the waiting room in a state of panic, anxiously looked into the face of Ayato, who was lying on the sofa.

“Ah, yes. I’m all rig.....!”

Ayato, who had put a wet towel on his forehead, frowned at the pain that ran through his whole body which he tried to raise.

“.....You don’t seem to be so all right.”

Saya, who came out from behind Kirin, also had a somewhat anxious expression.

“.....Well, it can’t be helped since you act rashly so much. After all... You exceeded your original limit by nearly one whole minute.”

Julis said while sighing. She replaced the towel on Ayato's forehead.

Its coldness was quite pleasant to his body. Which was hot.

"But well. 'It' was also grandly exposed....."

Although they cancelled the winner interview and retired to the waiting room... It had already become widely known that there was some kind of limit to Ayato's power.

That said, in a sense it could not be helped. It was unavoidable that it would have been exposed someday; It was just that it had been somewhat earlier than expected.

The problem was—

"The next match." Claudia pointed it out.

As expected. She was worried about Ayato and came to see his condition.

"Haa..... Exactly."

Julis greatly sighed once again while holding her temple.

The backlash of breaking the seal was strong, and given the situation Ayato could not satisfactorily move for nearly a whole day.

Since the recovery itself would be fast if he quietly rested, he might somehow manage after the second day, but.....

“After all, the fifth round is already tomorrow. We must think of something.”

“.....Well, I will somehow manage.”

“Ho~ou—”

As Ayato said so, Julis glared at Ayato with half-opened eyes and tightly grabbed his arm.

“Ooouch.....!”

“How can you say such, when you’re in this state? You’re overly optimistic, you know?”

As she released her hand, Julis said amazed.

“It’s not really like I’m overly optimistic. I understand that it’s serious. But — I can’t afford to break a promise.”

“A promise?”

“I will become Julis’ strength, haven’t I said so? At this rate, I won’t be able to do it. So. I will somehow manage.”

“Wha-.....!”

Julis' face quickly turns red and she looked away as she was flustered.

"I-Idiot! When I wondered what you would say, you suddenly!"

Then Saya and Kirin broke in there.

".....Okay. Then, I'll help Ayato so that he can quickly recover."
"

"I-I will also anything! I will make rice balls, too!"

"Ei... You should rather worry about your own match!"

As she looked at Ayato, who smiled wryly at Julis and the others, Claudia was standing to Ayato's side before he knew it. Her expression was gentle and warm as usual.

"If you get past tomorrow's match, for the time being, the time period before the next quarterfinals will contain an adjustment day . You will also be able to rest. However....."

"Yeah, that's right."

Even if they were able to survive tomorrow, at this rate, they would repeat the same thing. They had to find a fundamental solution.

"Whew....."

As Ayato exhaled, he quietly closed his eyes.

It seemed like he had to seriously face this seal soon somehow.

—And it meant that he must face his big sister's disappearance.

References

1. ↑ Either referring to “gathering clouds”, that is “trouble on the horizon” or Ama-no-Murakumo no Tsurugi, the Kusanagi Sword <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ama-no-Murakumo-no-Tsurugi>
 2. ↑ Referring to those next highest in rank and thus making good progress towards becoming one of the Top Twelve.
 3. ↑ Thick Japanese wheat noodles.
 4. ↑ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moratorium_\(law\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moratorium_(law))
 5. ↑ It means here that if, for example, they were stronger last year in the Phoenix, this year, they could be stronger in the Gryps and the next year in the Lindvolus and so on. Their strength varied every year.
 6. ↑ The ‘cats’ names are 銀 and , no doubt you would call them the “Odd Eyes” as a “team name” in English: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odd-eyed_cat
 7. ↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alumnus>
 8. ↑ Japanese lunch box
 9. ↑ or multi-tiered food boxes: multi-tiered compartment sets that also features a built in bowl to assemble anything further – all in a playful design
 10. ↑ former female student
 11. ↑ as to say a weapon generally used only for attack
 12. ↑ this **president** refers to student council president of her former academy World Dragon
 13. ↑ with adaptable fighting potential
 14. ↑ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_five
 15. ↑ simply put, one can say that about half of the student were going back home and the other half remained in the school
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16. ↑ AI: Artificial Intelligence
 17. ↑ big brother; here is said in form of respect
 18. ↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taijutsu>
 19. ↑ Ojisan literally means Uncle in Japanese. Can also be used as a slightly impolite way to address a middle aged man, similar to the English "Mister"
 20. ↑ He didn't even know specifically where that feeling came from
 21. ↑ here small grains are comparable to weak contestants.
 22. ↑ 体, literally "body technique" or "body skill". <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taijutsu>
 23. ↑ Onee-chan is Japanese for older sister
 24. ↑ Senjutsu (仙; English TV "Sage Jutsu"; Literally meaning "Sage Techniques") refers to a specialised field of techniques that allows the user to sense and then gather the natural energy (, shizen enerugī) around a person
 25. ↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taijutsu>
 26. ↑ In Japanese, "katana" means a long sword and it represents a blade, which is a little curved, with a single edge and a very sharp point.
 27. ↑ It means that their names are not recorded in the Named Charts
 28. ↑ name of Kirin's katana
 29. ↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camellia> and images of it are the red flower at the top of this page: http://www.nagominoniwa.net/blog3/2013/07/post_852.html
 30. ↑ here it means the drawing of lots for each match
 31. ↑ I mean here the staff of the student council
 32. ↑ The Japanese term for affordable apartment complexes that are not inside of high rise buildings, not an actual
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western style mansion. They are those one or two room apartments you see in every manga and anime you have ever watched.

- 33. ↑ The Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction
- 34. ↑ here refer to the members of the Integrated Enterprise Foundation
- 35. ↑ for those, who have forgotten, Gravi-Sheath is the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction. The Ogre Lux used by Irene.
- 36. ↑ here also means that Gravi-Sheath required a huge amount of prana to activate its ability
- 37. ↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chakram>
- 38. ↑ Mechanical advantage gained from being in a position to apply leverage.
- 39. ↑ price here refers to compensation that an Ogre Lux takes to its user in exchange for the use of its ability
- 40. ↑ it's an idiom; means something that you say which means it is best not to take risks even if it seems boring or hard work to be careful